

**Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne and Victoria:  
Response to Joint Standing Committee on Migration Inquiry into Multiculturalism in  
Australia**

The Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne and Victoria was formed in 1897 and continues to serve as the peak organization that represents the interests of the Greek community in Victoria. Throughout its long history it has played a pioneering role in advocating the rights of migrants and refugees, as well as a foundational role in the development of multiculturalism. It welcomes the opportunity to participate in further dialogue over the current needs of migrant communities and the future forms of multiculturalism.

The emergence of multicultural policies in the 1970s led to a period of tremendous cultural revitalization and facilitated numerous pathways into social inclusion. There is no doubt that this broad social and cultural transformation also provided considerable economic stimulus and played a powerful role in raising the self-esteem of countless Australians. We applaud the Federal Government's commitment to affirm the principles of multiculturalism in their policy document *The People of Australia - Australia's Multicultural Policy*. While this document is to be commended as a valuable step, we also believe that a number of fundamental principles need to be defended, and a new approach towards multiculturalism needs to be defined.

The Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne and Victoria is committed to playing a major role in the delivery of education, welfare and cultural services to the Greek community. However, there is a strong belief that governmental support in each of these fields has been compromised in the past decade.

The status of the Greek language is not sufficiently recognized within education programs.

The provision of welfare services for the aged is inadequate, and translation or interpreting support services have been reduced.

Despite the growing popularity of the Antipodes festival and other high profile activities, support for cultural projects in the Greek community only gain minimal funding.

The Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne and Victoria would call on the Federal Government to revitalize its commitment towards the defending the capacity of migrant community to deepen linguistic diversity, develop appropriate welfare provisions, and extend their cultural presence in the broader community.

The Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne and Victoria would like to take this opportunity to reiterate the observations and recommendations that were outlined in its detailed submission to the Victorian Languages Strategy Discussion Paper for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. In this submission it was noted that despite poor levels of support towards language education and a general level of decline in the retention rates for language education at secondary and tertiary levels, Greek remains in the top 3 of the 46 languages taught in Victoria. However, the relative success of the Greek language is due to the high levels of enrolments in after school community and private schools, and is heavily dependent on the enormous financial contribution of the Greek Government (over \$5 million per year), and support from the private sector. This

submission has expressed strong criticism against the wavering commitment to the delivery of Greek language education in Government schools. It claimed that despite the promise to expand the provision of language education, the evidence of the past decade reveals that the provision of language education has been “devalued and undermined”. At present approximately 10,000 students are attending after hour community / private schools due to the failure of Government Schools to adequately deliver language education. This submission has recommended; a significant expansion in the delivery of Language Programs in Government Schools; the establishment of a Greek Teacher Training Centre; and enhanced levels of Government support for LOTE teachers in both Government and community / private schools.

We would also reiterate the specific principle of “learn Greek to improve your English”, and that in general we would underline the point that learning a community language is the bedrock of Australia Multiculturalism and the gateway to being a global citizen. On this basis we would call on the Federal Government to reverse the decline in levels of support for language education at the tertiary level, and in particular, to elevate the status of Greek to be on the First Stage of Development, equivalent to Italian and Chinese, in the Draft Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Languages.

It is important to acknowledge the needs of newly arrived migrants and refugees and provide appropriate and well resources settlements services. The Federal Government has since the Galbally Report in the late 1970’s made available considerable programs in this space and these resources aid significantly in the speedy integration of migrants and refugees in employment, training, housing and other aspects o life in a new country.

The Greek speaking community is now regarded as a settled community. In many respects this is accurate as the bulk of migration by this community to Australia took place 30-40 years ago.

However the Greek - born elderly population is a group of people who on the whole have very low levels of English language competency and their needs in terms of access to services equates to those of newly arrived migrants. Australian Greek Welfare Society (AGWS) a major ethno-specific agency in Melbourne reports that there are very large numbers of Greek speaking elders, approximately 2,500 per annum who present for case-work and counseling to AGWS. This agency reports that the social work staff that it employs to deliver these services is now derived from its fund-raising activities. The federal government removed funding, under the then Grant in aid scheme, stating that Greek community was now settled and therefore not in need of these services. Clearly this is not the case, as the high use, of Greek speaking people presenting at this agency for casework services. It is imperative that the needs of an ageing, numerically large Greek community be acknowledged and that essential core services are funded.

Apart from defending the core principles restoring funds for aged welfare service and assistance and extending support for language education, the Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne and Victoria would also propose that the federal Government should adopt a new approach to define the future policies of multiculturalism. This new policy approach needs to reflect the shifts in migration patterns, the aspirations of migrants and the communication practices in a globalized world. In this context, there will also need to be a closer examination of how multicultural principles of inclusion, recognition and justice are best defined in contemporary society.

Migration patterns in the 21st century are dramatically different to those that emerged in the post war period of the 20th century. People are on the move on a far more regular basis than ever before. It is no longer tenable to think of migration as a one-way journey with fixed and final settlement.

The plethora of new types of visas and the now common sense of bi-location or flexible citizenship is indicative of the new forms of mobility and belonging. Among the recent arrival of migrants there is a far greater range in the professional skills and cultural background than was evident in earlier periods. This diversity has also generated new social challenges. For instance, while refugees and entrepreneurs have different levels of access to economic and political resources, they all possess a much more robust image of their cultural identity, a profound sense of their human rights and a more vivid picture of their social entitlement.

The new forms of communication are also challenging traditional assumptions of social belonging and cultural identity. Young and old people now engage in transnational social network sites, download cultural content from distant websites, and participate in diasporic media platforms. This has generated new forms of instantaneous connection with people that are separated across vast distances, but it also created a new kind of cosmopolitan awareness.

In order to address these new challenges Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne and Victoria proposes to develop a media hub that will form the centrepiece of its new community tower. The proposed Antipodes Centre for Greek Culture, Heritage and Language ('the Centre') is to be a multi-faceted, contemporary facility, which will reinforce the historic link of the Greek community with the Lonsdale St precinct and will act to ensure the continued survival of the precinct. At the same time the centre will attract both Greek and non-Greek Australians to explore the contribution that the Greek community has made to Australia and the way that Australians of Greek origin identify with their culture, heritage and language.

It is intended that "the Centre" will be an active place, a hub and inclusive focal point for the Greek Australian community. It will present the history of Greek/Australian culture, language and religion from the perspective of the present through a series of changing exhibitions, events, performances, screenings and multi-media interactive experiences. In addition to its cultural and symbolic role as a 'home' for the Greek community, "the Centre" will be utilised as a practical home for meetings with the Greek government and other official bodies. The aim is to convert the old Community building into a "Centre" that is a beacon for Lonsdale Street. The "Centre" will be a contemporary focal point that provides a new cosmopolitan, professional and hospitable cultural destination for the city of Melbourne.

The Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne and Victoria recognizes that it is facing radical challenges in the ways it communicates and develops its distinct cultural identity in the contemporary context and thereby believes that a "Centre" which addresses a wider range of participatory cultural activities and embraces the uses of new communication technologies is vital for its survival. It therefore calls on the Federal Government to extend its support for this initiative.

We are also impressed with new levels of interest amongst educated and professional Greeks to migrate to Australia. This massive spike of inquiries into migration opportunities in

Australia represents a great potential to both enrich the Greek community and generate a significant body of highly skilled and educated migrants.

At present multicultural policies are formulated at all levels of government; local, state and federal. We believe that it would be beneficial to have a more coordinated approach and a wider perspective on multiculturalism. This would require a closer integration of approaches across the nation, and also a clearer strategy for regional and global engagement. Rather than focusing on how migrants can contribute to economic expansion and social cohesion in Australia, it might be worth considering how a more open and more dynamic cultural context will provide the trust and interest to deepen the socio-economic ties and thereby strengthen the links between people in a globalized world. In short, we would invoke Jean Monnet's retrospective lesson on the formation of the European Union: "If I had to do it again, I would begin with culture."

## **Recommendations**

1. A systematic review of governmental support for services and programs lead by the Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne and Victoria in education, welfare and cultural programming.
2. An investigation into migration recruiting strategies for skilled migrants from Greece.
3. The inclusion of representatives from the Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne and Victoria in the Australian Multicultural Council.

Author: Nikos Papastergiadis

Author of the submission: Prof. Nikos Papastergiadis (Advisor to the GOCMV Cultural Affairs)

Document prepared by: Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne & Victoria Cultural Affairs Committee

Committee members: Prof. Nikos Papastergiadis – Advisor of Cultural Affairs  
Costas Markos – Hon. General Secretary of the GOCMV  
Vasilis Papastergiadis – President of the GOCMV  
George Koletsis – Board Member of the GOCMV  
Theodore Markos – Board Member of the GOCMV & Head of  
GOCMV Education Committee

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