



The Community Relations Commission For a multicultural NSW responded to challenges and made significant achievements in the year 2002-2003.

The Commission implemented initiatives that delivered Government commitments in **community relations**.

In July 2002, the Arabic Youth Partnership was established. The partnership addressed community concerns about young people of Arabic background and involved young people, community services, Arabic community agencies and a number of government departments, schools and education institutions. In November the Premier and Minister for Citizenship, the Hon. Bob Carr MP, announced the Arabic Youth Partnership as the gold winner in the Social Justice category of the 2002 Premier's Public Sector Awards.

Cabramatta CityWatch was established by the Commission in association with the NSW Police, the Premier's Department, the Hon. Reba Meagher and Fairfield City Council to build up a partnership between the Cabramatta Local Area Command and its local community. Its task is to look at crime and community safety issues of concern in the area. It brings residents, community members and business people together with government representatives to develop strategies to address and solve local issues.

In mid-October 2002 Premier Carr asked the Commission to set up a Community Harmony Reference Group to ensure a co-ordinated rapid response to any local community relations issues which may arise in the wake of the Bali bombings and possible Australian involvement in a conflict with Iraq. The Premier said "we must ensure that there are no reprisals or acts of vengeance directed against members of our community".

The Reference Group met for the first time on 21 October 2002. It comprised NSW Police, the Departments of Education and Training, Community Services and the NSW Anti-Discrimination Board. Sydney's Islamic, Arabic, Jewish and Sikh communities were also represented on the Reference Group.

The Commission monitored and reported to the Reference Group on media trends in the lead up to, outbreak and consequences of the conflict with Iraq. In response to a request by Iraqi community representatives, the Commission held a meeting with various Iraqi community representatives to help facilitate the establishment of an Iraqi community council. The Commission subsequently undertook to translate the council's constitution into Arabic.

The success of community relations initiatives were complemented by the Commission's **effectiveness in identifying and responding to community needs**.



Photo by Warren Duncan

Mr Stepan Kerkyasharian, AO, Chairperson, and Her Excellency, Professor Marie Bashir, AO, Governor of New South Wales, at the launch of Fair Go Australia.

The B'nai B'rith, a 160-year old international Jewish service organisation, approached the Commission in 2001 with a proposal to create a national anti-racism program to assist victims. The program, called *Fair Go Australia*, aims to help people who might be bystanders to racist incidents to take an active stand against racism. The Commission has entered into a partnership with Fair Go Australia Pty Ltd, a subsidiary of B'nai B'rith NSW, and contributed funding to the project. The Rev. Bill Crews, of the Exodus Foundation, chairs the project, with advice from a multi-community steering committee with representation from a wide variety of community organisations.

At the request of the Premier, the Commission established the NSW Pacific Island Council to tackle youth issues in the community and assist youth to avoid anti-social behaviour. The Council has members drawn from the Cook Island, Fijian, Maori, Samoan and Tongan communities.

The Commission closely monitored all of the state's media to **track issues and the treatment of issues that can impact on community relations**. Since the events of September 11, 2001, in the United States, there has been continuous pressure from sections of the media on the multi-ethnic Muslim community and the broad Arabic-speaking community in New South Wales.

The Commission advised and encouraged community leaders to express their views in the media, including calling talk-back radio programs and to work at establishing a rapport with controversial broadcasters and columnists. Some success has been achieved in putting alternative views and in correcting misconceptions and stereotyping.

Other agencies, for example the NSW Police, have also been active in developing closer working relations with ethnic communities, in an effort to break down barriers and develop more informed and harmonious relations between groups and between the communities and those in authority.

The Commission **attracted increased government and community involvement in the rural and regional areas** through its regional advisory councils. The councils work closely with the government agencies and the community and provide local solutions to local issues. As part of its commitment to visit regional areas, the Commission held its meeting of 11 October 2002 in Albury. The Commission met with members of the Albury Regional Advisory Council and discussed multicultural issues of the region.



Photo by Warren Duncan

Mr Joe Semrani, Deputy Chairperson Michael Marx, Detective Superintendent Carolyn Smith, Police Commissioner Ken Moroney, Chairperson Stepan Kerkyasharian, Mr Aldo Pennini, Commissioner Jamal Rifi, and Commissioner Ned Maruncic at the inaugural meeting of the Community Harmony Reference Group.

Wide **consultations** were held on the Green Paper *Cultural Harmony The Next Decade 2002-2012* during the year, and a large number of written submissions were received.

The findings, recommendations and proposals from the Green paper, together with input from the consultations and submissions, will inform the development of a White Paper during 2003. This White Paper will establish broad directions in the areas of policy and community relations for the next ten years.

The Ethnic Affairs Priorities Statement Program (EAPS) continued to address issues of access and equity by NSW government agencies.

A major issue that arose during 2002 was the insurance of community events and insurance coverage for community – and especially religious – institutions. The Commission continues to work with other NSW Government agencies and the Insurance Council of Australia to address this issue.

The 2002 National Multicultural Awards **recognised and celebrated excellence** achieved by businesses and government and community organisations in harnessing the benefits of Australia's cultural diversity.

The Commission supported another Street Festivals Project in 2002. Through the Street Festivals Project, the Commission aims to promote and assist community events which celebrate cultural, linguistic and religious diversity. It also aims to involve community ownership of the events, build and strengthen community networks, improve social capital, disseminate information and link people to local services.

Within the Commission, work practices **continued to improve to achieve best practice**. Projects were implemented to automate processes in language service provision, ethnic media monitoring and payroll transactions. The Commission was one of only 12, out of 187, agencies that successfully complied with the Government-wide records audit compliance requirements. The Commission's new premises at Castlereagh Street, Sydney, were refurbished in compliance with the NSW Government Office Accommodation Guidelines and relevant Australian standards.

I express the Commission's appreciation to all who contributed this year to the achievement of its objectives. I gratefully acknowledge the contribution of the members of the ten regional advisory councils along with their chairpersons. The Grants Advisory Committee is an important advisory body to the Commission and I thank its members for their contribution.

The Commission relocated its Ashfield workforce to Stockland House in Castlereagh Street, Sydney, in December 2002, ending eleven months of operating in split locations following the devastating fire in Ashfield in January 2002. I thank the staff for maintaining the level of service required of the Commission during that period.

In all these achievements I acknowledge the contribution of the Commission staff. I commend their hard work and dedication and thank them all.

In all its undertakings, the Commission has benefited by having the Premier, the Hon. Bob Carr, MP, as its minister. On behalf of the Commission I also thank the Departmental Liaison Officer, Mr Sassoon Grigorian, for his support of the Commission.

I acknowledge the support of the Hon. Morris Iemma, MP, the outgoing Minister Assisting the Premier on Citizenship, and welcome his successor, the Hon. John Hatzistergos.

I also thank the Deputy Chairperson, Mr Michael Marx AM, and my fellow commissioners.

The Commission looks forward to building on its achievements for the benefit of all people living in our culturally diverse community.



Stepan Kerkyasharian AM
Chairperson
Community Relations Commission
For a multicultural NSW