



New South Wales Government
1996

Building on Our Cultural Diversity

Report of the Review of the
Ethnic Affairs Commission Act 1979
and the Development of an
Ethnic Affairs Action Plan 2000

White Paper

**New South Wales Government
1996**

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FOREWORD

It gives me great pleasure to release publicly the White Paper entitled *Building on Our Cultural Diversity* which outlines the New South Wales Government's ethnic affairs policy up to and beyond the year 2000.

The release of this document honours an important pre-election commitment of my Government - to review the Ethnic Affairs Commission and the Ethnic Affairs Commission Act 1979, and to prepare a Plan of Action towards the Year 2000.



The Review, which was conducted over a 12 month period, included consultation with a large number of individuals and groups across the state, as well as with government agencies. In May 1996 the Government released a draft report as a Green Paper and invited public comment.

Over ninety written responses were received on the Green Paper, with the overwhelming majority supporting the Government's direction and providing constructive comments.

The White Paper reflects this feedback. It spells out the key roles of the New South Wales Government in ethnic affairs. It also details the major activities and responsibilities of government agencies in terms of better meeting the needs of our culturally diverse society.

The State of New South Wales has a proud history of recognising and valuing the contribution of all of its people. I believe this White Paper builds on this history and provides New South Wales with the right balance of vision and concrete initiatives to deliver genuine reform in ethnic affairs.

As Premier and Minister for Ethnic Affairs I look forward to overseeing the important reforms contained in this Paper. A major step towards these reforms was taken recently when the Ethnic Affairs Commission Amendment Bill 1996 passed through State Parliament.

This legislation, together with the progressive initiatives contained in the White Paper, will deliver tangible social, cultural and economic benefits to all people in New South Wales.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Bob Carr". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Bob Carr

Premier

Minister for Ethnic Affairs

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY		iv
SECTION 1: BACKGROUND TO THE REVIEW		1
1.1 STATUS OF ETHNIC AFFAIRS IN NEW SOUTH WALES	1	
1.2 THE REVIEW PROCESS	5	
1.3 ABOUT THE REPORT	7	
SECTION 2: CONTEXT FOR THE REVIEW		8
2.1 DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT	8	
2.2 KEY ISSUES RAISED IN THE CONSULTATIONS	13	
2.3 GOVERNMENT CONTEXT	34	
2.3.1 Related NSW Government Policies	34	
2.3.2 Commonwealth and Local Government Relations	36	
2.4 NON-GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE SECTORS	39	
SECTION 3: NSW GOVERNMENT ETHNIC AFFAIRS ACTION PLAN 2000		41
3.1 ROLES OF THE NSW GOVERNMENT IN ETHNIC AFFAIRS	42	
3.2 KEY RESULT AREAS AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES	43	
3.2.1 Key Result Area: Social Justice	43	
3.2.2 Key Result Area: Community Harmony	47	
3.2.3 Key Result Area: Economic and Cultural Opportunities	49	
3.3 IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND REPORTING	52	
3.3.1 Reporting arrangements	52	
3.3.2 What agencies are expected to do	55	
3.3.3 What the Ethnic Affairs Commission is expected to do	59	
SECTION 4: PUTTING THE ACTION PLAN TO WORK		62
4.1. LEGISLATIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES	62	
4.1.1 Amendments to the Ethnic Affairs Commission Act	62	
4.1.2 Regulations regarding Annual Reports Requirements	63	

4.2 RESOURCES FOR AGENCIES	63
4.3 EVALUATION	64
4.4 TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION	65
ATTACHMENTS	67
ATTACHMENT 1 Ethnic Affairs Policy Statements Program	68
ATTACHMENT 2 Charter of Principles for a Culturally Diverse Society	70
ATTACHMENT 3 Steering Committee of the Review of the EAC Act	71
ATTACHMENT 4 Consultations: When and Where	72
ATTACHMENT 5 Written Responses to the Green Paper	75
ATTACHMENT 6 Ethnic Affairs Key Agencies for 1996-97	78
ATTACHMENT 7 Ethnic Affairs Commission Amendment Bill 1996	79
APPENDIX	86
Demographic Trends in New South Wales	
TABLES	94
REFERENCES	107

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PREAMBLE

The New South Wales Government has committed itself to major reforms in ethnic affairs, and to this end, one of its first actions was to institute a thorough review of the Ethnic Affairs Commission Act 1979 and the drawing up of an Ethnic Affairs Action Plan 2000.

After extensive consultation with the community, as well as with senior managers within the public sector, in May 1996 a draft Review and Action Plan were released for public comment in the form of a Government Green Paper. Over ninety written submissions on the Green Paper were received, including over forty submissions from NSW Government agencies.

The contents of all submissions to the Review were carefully considered and the Green Paper added to and amended where appropriate to transform it into the White Paper, *Building on Our Cultural Diversity*.

The White Paper outlines the key ethnic affairs outcomes and result areas on which New South Wales Government agencies will deliver, as well as the monitoring and reporting arrangements which will be put in place to ensure that the Ethnic Affairs Action Plan 2000 is fully implemented.

WHY HAVE A REVIEW?

The stated purpose of the Review of the Ethnic Affairs Commission Act 1979 was to reinforce the Government's commitment in ethnic affairs to ensure that people from diverse cultural backgrounds are an integral and essential part of the social, cultural and economic future of New South Wales.

There has not been a major review of the Ethnic Affairs Commission Act since its enactment in 1979. As such the Government regarded a review as timely and one that could ensure New South Wales is best placed to maximise the benefits of our culturally diverse community up to and beyond the year 2000.

Over the past two decades there have been significant changes which affect the area of ethnic affairs. The most important of these changes has been the considerable increase in the level of cultural diversity of the population. Other changes include changes in community expectations and standards, and changes in public administration at all levels of Government.

New South Wales has the highest proportion of any State in Australia of overseas born as well as the highest overall number of people born overseas. At the 1991 Census nearly 23 per cent of the NSW population were born overseas. This shows a steady increase over the last ten years from 20 per cent in 1981.

Currently more than 41 per cent of the NSW population is either overseas born, or has one or both parents born overseas. The population of New South Wales is made up of people from over 220 countries.

While future trends in population are difficult to predict, it may be expected that Australia will continue to grow as a multicultural nation. Against this backdrop, the Review of the Ethnic Affairs Commission Act and the development of an Ethnic Affairs Action Plan 2000 is both timely and productive.

WHAT DID THE CONSULTATIONS REVEAL?

Between September 1995 and April 1996 public consultations were held around New South Wales as part of the Review. The purpose of the consultations was to identify the key social, economic, cultural and political issues that affect people from ethnic communities living in New South Wales. The consultations were well attended, particularly by members of ethnic communities.

During these consultations, and in the written submissions received following the Green Paper, a very broad range of issues were raised. These issues covered the full breadth of government and social policies: from employment to community services; from law and order to arts and cultural issues; from local government to issues affecting specific groups such as older people or women; from community relations to education, to name a few.

Section 2.2 of the White Paper summarises the major issues raised. These issues reflect the views and perceptions of people involved in the consultations and do not necessarily reflect current government policy or priorities.

The range of issues raised however, reveals that ethnic affairs affects all aspects of government activity. As such it requires a whole-of-government response. It also requires a framework within which NSW government agencies can operate and deliver real outcomes to people from diverse cultural backgrounds in New South Wales.

WHAT ROLE SHOULD THE NSW GOVERNMENT PLAY IN ETHNIC AFFAIRS?

Given the breadth of ethnic affairs issues raised in the consultations, and the degree to which they touch on a wide range of sectors - all levels of government, community, the private sector, unions and the media - the Review sought to identify the key roles for the New South Wales Government in ethnic affairs.

Four important and interrelated roles were identified:

1. To provide leadership in encouraging and valuing a culturally diverse society and in promoting social cohesion.
2. To ensure that State Government policy, legal and planning frameworks support our culturally diverse society.
3. To ensure access to quality goods and services, and an equitable distribution of those goods and services.
4. To encourage community development so that over time, ethnic communities can meet their own needs and priorities.

THE ETHNIC AFFAIRS ACTION PLAN 2000

One of the core tasks of the Review was to identify the major actions and strategies that the NSW Government and its agencies will pursue to address the major issues affecting ethnic communities in this State, both now and into the future. This was done through the development of the Ethnic Affairs Action Plan 2000.

The Action Plan 2000 does two things:

- ♦ it identifies three key result areas where Government activity is needed and outcomes are expected; and
- ♦ it specifies the actions to be taken by Government agencies, including how agencies will report on progress in achieving outcomes in the key result areas.

Key Result Areas and Expected Outcomes

The three key result areas identified in the Plan are *Social Justice*, *Community Harmony*, and *Economic and Cultural Opportunities*. The major goal for each key result area and major outcomes are listed in summary form below.

1) Social Justice

The Government will ensure that resources are fairly distributed, that ethnic communities are consulted about decisions related to Government program development and service delivery, that the rights and responsibilities of all people are recognised, and that services are effectively targeted to meet the needs of members of ethnic communities.

Major outcomes for this key result area include: policy and program development which is responsive to linguistic, cultural, racial and religious diversity; increased participation by members of ethnic communities in Government decision making processes; increased understanding of cultural diversity by Government-funded organisations; and more accessible programs and services delivered by Local Government.

2) Community Harmony

The Government will foster a climate of mutual respect by highlighting the benefits of cultural diversity to the community, by supporting anti-discrimination measures and by promoting and maintaining community harmony. As Australia moves into the next century, major issues will include those of cultural identity and shared values. The challenge is to develop a common understanding that cultural diversity is one of the defining characteristics of a united, modern Australia.

Major outcomes for this key result area include: a decrease in racial vilification and racially based violence; valuing of diverse cultures and languages other than English; public sector work environments free from harassment and discrimination; and freedom to practise a range of religious beliefs in the spirit of tolerance.

3) Economic and Cultural Opportunities

The Government will promote the benefits of multiculturalism in the economic and cultural life of the State. The Government will recognise cultural diversity as a positive force in the development of the State's economic opportunities and in enriching our community through social and cultural activities.

Major outcomes for this key result area include: the Government utilising the language and cultural skills of the members of NSW ethnic communities to attract business and expand overseas trade; improved employment opportunities and outcomes for members of ethnic communities; multicultural arts and artists will become an integral part of the cultural life of the State; and the activities associated with the Sydney 2000 Olympics will be culturally inclusive and reflect the rich diversity of Australian society.

Each government agency will be responsible for implementing their own strategies, policies, programs or services to achieve outcomes in each of the three key result areas. These strategies will be reflected in their Ethnic Affairs Priorities Statement.

An important second element of the Ethnic Affairs Action Plan 2000 is the public reporting by agencies of their achievements in the key result areas. A simple, three part reporting arrangement is to be implemented, comprising:

1. Ethnic Affairs Priorities Statements (EAPS), to be prepared annually by all NSW Government agencies;
2. Ethnic Affairs Agreements, to be entered into by select agencies with the Ethnic Affairs Commission;
3. An annual Ethnic Affairs Report to the Minister for Ethnic Affairs, to be prepared by the Ethnic Affairs Commission, for tabling in Parliament.

1) Ethnic Affairs Priorities Statements (EAPS)

To ensure that all Government agencies take up the opportunities and challenges posed by our culturally diverse society, there will be a new requirement for all agencies to develop an Ethnic Affairs Priorities Statement (EAPS).

EAPS will ensure that planning of ethnic affairs activities becomes an integral part of each agency's corporate planning process. Agencies will develop, implement and measure the results of a mix of ethnic affairs policies, practices, programs and services as part of their core business.

Public access to information about agencies' ethnic affairs activities is an essential part of Government accountability. A report on EAPS progress and outcomes will therefore be provided in each agency's annual report. Agencies will also be required to supply their EAPS to the Ethnic Affairs Commission to enable monitoring and analysis of ethnic affairs activity at a whole-of-Government level.

2) Ethnic Affairs Agreements

Each year the Ethnic Affairs Commission will enter into a number of Ethnic Affairs Agreements with selected agencies. These Agreements will enable the Commission and each partner agency to work co-operatively to resolve specific challenges or problem issues affecting ethnic communities. The ability of the Commission to initiate and enter into such agreements will be enshrined in legislation.

An Ethnic Affairs Agreement will contain clearly defined objectives and strategies for achieving an identified outcome. It will also contain performance indicators and the budget and other resources to be used by the agency in implementing the Agreement.

As with Ethnic Affairs Priorities Statements, public access to information about Ethnic Affairs Agreements is important. A summary of the activities and outcomes resulting from these Agreements will therefore be reported in agency annual reports.

3) Ethnic Affairs Report to Parliament

The third component of reporting on ethnic affairs issues will be in the form of an annual Ethnic Affairs Report to the Minister for Ethnic Affairs, prepared by the Ethnic Affairs Commission. This Report will summarise and assess the progress and achievements of the New South Wales public sector in implementing the Ethnic Affairs Action Plan 2000. Based on current EAPS and Ethnic Affairs Agreements, the Ethnic Affairs Report will assist in identifying areas for on-going action by Government, and suggest potential issues for coverage under future Ethnic Affairs Agreements. The Ethnic Affairs Report will be tabled by the Minister in Parliament and be available to the public.

In the year 2001, the Ethnic Affairs Commission will include in its annual Ethnic Affairs Report an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Ethnic Affairs Action Plan 2000 in achieving outcomes in the three key result areas, the effectiveness of the monitoring and reporting arrangements, and will recommend changes as necessary.

Ethnic Affairs Priorities Statements, Ethnic Affairs Agreements and the annual Ethnic Affairs Report will provide a comprehensive reporting arrangement which will assist agencies, the Government, Parliament and the public to evaluate progress in ethnic affairs.

HOW WILL THESE CHANGES BE ENFORCED?

The Government is committed to ensuring that the above reforms are implemented across the entire public sector and that this is done in a timely manner. As such the Government has already successfully introduced amendments to the Ethnic Affairs Commission Act 1979 consist with the White Paper reforms. These amendments include:

- ◆ the addition of a set of principles describing and recognising the cultural diversity of New South Wales;
- ◆ an additional Object of the Ethnic Affairs Commission to promote the social, cultural and economic benefits of a culturally diverse society;
- ◆ an additional Function of the Ethnic Affairs Commission to enable the Commission to initiate and enter into Ethnic Affairs Agreements with other State Government agencies;
- ◆ a requirement for the Commission to provide an annual Ethnic Affairs Report to Parliament via the Minister for Ethnic Affairs.

Included at Attachment 7 of the White Paper is a full copy of the Bill containing these amendments. It is proposed that the Amended Act be proclaimed in January 1997.

In addition to these legislative changes, new regulations will be issued that require all public authorities, including all government departments and statutory authorities, to prepare and report on their Ethnic Affairs Priorities Statements, as well as any Ethnic Affairs Agreements, in their Annual Reports. The first reports to contain this information will be the 1996-97 Annual Reports.

The necessary regulations to effect these reforms will be issued concurrent with the amended Ethnic Affairs Commission Act coming into effect.

CONCLUSION

Cultural diversity is now an undeniable aspect of life in New South Wales.

The New South Wales Government recognises that our culturally diverse community is an asset of the state and offers great social, cultural and economic opportunities that can be built on.

The Ethnic Affairs Action Plan 2000 - containing the three key result areas of *Social Justice*, *Community Harmony* and *Economic and Cultural Opportunities* - presents NSW with an exciting and strategic new direction in ethnic affairs. Ethnic Affairs Priorities Statements and Ethnic Affairs Agreements, combined with the annual ethnic affairs report to Parliament prepared by the Ethnic Affairs Commission, will significantly improve the accountability of public sector agencies. These reforms will produce measureable benefits to all people in New South Wales.

The combination of these initiatives, combined with the Amended Ethnic Affairs Commission Act, will place New South Wales at the forefront of ethnic affairs reforms in Australia.

While the Government of New South Wales has a critical role to play in improving the life and opportunities of all people in this state, action is required across the board - by individuals, community groups, industry, unions, the media and all levels of Government - if together we are to prosper and grow as a rich, culturally diverse society up to and beyond the year 2000.