

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND TO THE REVIEW

In the 1995 pre-election statement *Ethnic Affairs Policy - Taking up the Challenge*, the Labor Party undertook to review the Ethnic Affairs Commission Act 1979 and prepare an updated 'Plan of Action towards the Year 2000'. It also undertook to give a legislative basis to Ethnic Affairs Policy Statements (EAPS) and to provide a mechanism so that EAPS reports would be presented to Parliament on an annual basis.

This White Paper *Building on Our Cultural Diversity* describes the strategies for implementing these commitments. It outlines the key ethnic affairs outcomes and result areas on which New South Wales Government agencies will deliver. It also spells out the monitoring and reporting arrangements that will be put in place to ensure the Ethnic Affairs Action Plan 2000 is fully implemented.

1.1 STATUS OF ETHNIC AFFAIRS IN NSW

New South Wales has been committed to addressing the needs of people from culturally diverse backgrounds for two decades. Over this time successive governments have taken a series of steps that have brought about real improvements for members of ethnic communities living in NSW.

In 1976 the New South Wales Government initiated a wide ranging review into the needs of people in New South Wales of non-English speaking background. *The Participation Report* (1978), which resulted from the review, identified as a key principle that "no individual or group in the community should be discriminated against or excluded from the fullest participation in the social, economic, and cultural life of the community or from the fullest share of all opportunities the community offers". The Participation Report also specified, for the first time, what strategies the State Government would pursue to assist members of ethnic communities to gain more equitable access to government services.

On 1 December 1979 the Ethnic Affairs Commission of New South Wales was established by an Act of Parliament as a permanent Government agency to perform 3 key functions:

- 1) encourage participation of people from ethnic communities in the social, economic and cultural life of the community;
- 2) promote the unity of all ethnic groups in the community consistent with the recognition of their different cultural identities; and
- 3) promote liaison and cooperation between bodies concerned in ethnic affairs.

In 1983 the then-Government instituted the Ethnic Affairs Policy Statements (EAPS) Program to ensure all Government agencies gave effect to the Government's ethnic affairs policies and priorities (see Attachment 1).

The EAPS program, refined and added to over the following eight years, aimed to ensure that the needs of people of non-English speaking background were recognised, and that active steps were taken to address those needs.

In the early 'nineties there was a widely held view that it was timely to raise the profile of ethnic affairs after ten years of EAPS, and to introduce a more flexible reporting structure consistent with modern management practices. In February 1993 the then-Government introduced the New South Wales Charter of Principles for a Culturally Diverse Society (see Attachment 2).

The Charter affirmed that the people of NSW are culturally diverse and possess linguistic and cultural skills that need to be acknowledged and utilised as valuable resources for the social, cultural and economic development of the State. The Charter provided the basis for renewed ethnic affairs activity within State agencies.

Under the Charter program all Government agencies were required to develop a Statement of Intent followed by Implementation Plans. While these requirements applied across the board, a number of agencies were classified as Key Agencies by the Ethnic Affairs Commission and were given priority assistance in the development of their Charter Implementation Plans.

ACHIEVEMENTS IN ETHNIC AFFAIRS

Over the last two decades, New South Wales Governments have made significant achievements in ethnic affairs. These achievements have been witnessed across a broad range of Government activity.

In the area of *law reform* NSW has passed a number of important pieces of legislation that recognise the rights of individuals and protect them from discrimination, harassment and vilification. The key planks of this legislation have been the Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 and the Anti-Discrimination (Racial Vilification) Amendment Act 1989. This legislation outlaws discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, nationality, descent, ethno-religion or nationality.

To support this legislation, the NSW Government has established agencies such as the Anti-Discrimination Board, the Office of the Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment and the Ethnic Affairs Commission. These agencies ensure that all people in NSW, including members of ethnic communities, are aware of, and are assisted in, enforcing the State's anti-discrimination and related laws.

In the area of *service provision*, successive State Governments have initiated a number of programs that are aimed at ensuring people of non-English speaking background can access essential government information and advice. This has included ensuring access to State Government services by the provision of free interpreters through the language services provided by the Ethnic Affairs Commission and the Health Care Interpreter Service.

Over the last two decades the State *education* system has initiated major reforms to promote multicultural perspectives in school curricula, to enable students of non-English speaking background to learn English as a second language, and to ensure students can maintain and build on their skills in community languages. These have included the establishment of education support services, such as ethnic aides and community liaison officers and support for anti-racism and tolerance strategies such as the Whole School Anti-Racism Project.

The State's TAFE system has initiated substantial multicultural education and training programs over recent years including specialist English as a Second Language courses and vocational training to provide workers with skills in dealing with cultural diversity. In addition, the NSW Adult Migrant Education Service continues to provide English language and literacy programs for adults of non-English speaking background.

In the area of *employment* the State Government has supported a range of initiatives to assist members of ethnic communities to gain equal access to employment opportunities. This has included the establishment of the Migrant Skills and Qualifications Branch within the Department of Training and Education Coordination which has responsibility for the State's Migrants Skills Strategy and promotes the recognition of overseas skills and qualifications. It also runs initiatives such as the Special Migrant Placement Officers. In addition, the State Government funds targeted labour market programs such as Skillmax to assist people with overseas experience and qualifications to find employment commensurate with their skills.

In the area of *health services* and health promotions the Government has made significant progress over the last ten or so years. For example the NSW Health Department has undertaken a concerted campaign to ensure information on health issues is reaching members of ethnic communities. It has also established targeted services such as the Transcultural Mental Health Centre.

In *community services* a range of new initiatives have been introduced to help meet the changing needs of the community. The Department of Community Services has created a number of identified positions to ensure field staff have the necessary language and cultural skills to respond appropriately to the local community. Over the years the Department has also funded ethnic community groups to provide specific community and welfare services. The Home and Community Care Program has made progress in meeting the growing needs of older people and people with disabilities of non-English speaking background.

The *law and justice* sector has witnessed significant improvements over the years. The NSW Police Service for example has attempted to broaden the diversity of people it recruits, as well as improve its culture and practices to ensure policing is more attuned to cultural diversity issues.

Whilst significant progress has been made over the last two decades, the NSW Government has recognised that new priorities and outcomes are necessary if members of ethnic communities are to participate fully in the life of the State and the potential economic value of cultural diversity is to be realised.

Responsibility for ethnic affairs does not lie with the State Government alone. As described in Section 2.3.2 in more detail, the Commonwealth Government has a broad range of ethnic affairs functions, the most important of which relate to immigration policy and the provision of settlement services for new arrivals. Over the last decade the Commonwealth has also taken an active role in the promotion of citizenship; racial discrimination legislation (for example, the Racial Hatred Act, 1995); and increasing the diversity of material on television and other media (including funding of SBS television and radio).

In cooperation with the States and Territories, the Commonwealth has also acted to improve recognition of overseas skills and qualifications and worked on industrial relations and training initiatives, including employment practices within Commonwealth agencies. As the sphere of Government with the greatest taxing powers, the Commonwealth has traditionally funded a number of education, health and community services programs for ethnic communities, many of which are provided through State Government agencies or through Local Councils.

In addition, over the years ethnic affairs issues have received increasing attention by Local Government. Local Councils have become more active in ensuring their land use planning, zoning, and provision of services including libraries, child care and other community services are more appropriate to the cultural diversity of their residents.

Despite the significant changes which have occurred in ethnic affairs over the past two decades, there has not been a major review of the Ethnic Affairs Commission Act since its enactment in 1979. A Review is timely given the growing proportion of people in New South Wales from culturally diverse backgrounds, the significant changes that have occurred since the 1970s in community expectations and standards, and the changes in public administration in Commonwealth, State and Local Governments.

1.2 THE REVIEW PROCESS

In September 1995 the NSW Government initiated its Review of the Ethnic Affairs Commission Act, consistent with its pre-election commitment. The purpose of the Review was:

- ◆ To reinforce the Government's commitment in ethnic affairs to ensure that people of non-English speaking background are an integral and essential part of the social, cultural and economic future of New South Wales.

In order to achieve this purpose, the Review was undertaken according to the following Terms of Reference:

- ◆ Identify the key social, economic, cultural and political issues in the mid-1990s and for the coming decade that affect people from ethnic communities living in New South Wales;
- ◆ Identify appropriate roles for the New South Wales Government in order that it best meets its goals of acceptance of cultural diversity, promotion of social justice, and economic efficiency;
- ◆ Prepare a "New South Wales Government Ethnic Affairs Action Plan 2000" which is based on a partnership with the communities and incorporates the above findings; and
- ◆ Recommend changes to the Ethnic Affairs Commission Act, 1979 (and any other relevant legislation) needed to facilitate the implementation and monitoring of the New SouthWales Ethnic Affairs Action Plan 2000.

The Review was overseen by a steering committee with membership from the Premier's Office, Ethnic Affairs Commission, Premier's Department and The Cabinet Office (see Attachment 3).

During the first six months of the Review the Steering Committee instigated extensive consultations with community organisations, Government agencies and individuals throughout New South Wales. These consultations included a large number of ethnic community organisations and other key stakeholders including the Ethnic Communities' Council of NSW, and the Commissioners of the Ethnic Affairs Commission.

In February 1996 input was sought from Chief Executive Officers (or their representatives) from more than twenty key New South Wales Government agencies, particularly on the implementation of the Ethnic Affairs Action Plan.

Included at Attachment 4 is a full list of major consultations that were undertaken as part of the Review process.

In March 1996 the Review Steering Committee presented their Report to the Premier and Minister for Ethnic Affairs. It was agreed that this Report should be released as a Government Green Paper.

On 27 May 1996 the Premier and Minister for Ethnic Affairs released the Draft Report entitled *Building on Our Cultural Diversity* as a Government Green Paper and invited public comment.

More than ninety written submissions on the Green Paper were received from a broad range of community groups, Government agencies, individuals and other stakeholders. Included at Attachment 5 is a list of the organisations and individuals who provided submissions.

The Steering Committee carefully assessed all submissions on the Green Paper, and where appropriate made changes to the report. In September 1996 the Committee presented its final report to the Premier and Minister for Ethnic Affairs and recommended it be released as a Government White Paper.

In October 1996 the Government agreed to release the final Report of the Review, *Building on Our Cultural Diversity*, as a White Paper and to instigate the reforms contained therein.



Photo: Karen Mork

1.3 ABOUT THE REPORT

This Report, *Building on Our Cultural Diversity*, describes the future direction of ethnic affairs in NSW, including the major outcomes that are expected as part of the Ethnic Affairs Action Plan 2000.

Section 2 of the Report provides a context for the NSW Government's Review of the Ethnic Affairs Commission Act. It summarises the demographic trends likely to affect New South Wales over the coming years. It identifies major issues raised in consultations with ethnic community organisations and individuals and as part of the Green Paper process. It also identifies the current Government context for the Review, including the relationships between the Commonwealth, State and Local Governments, and other related issues that provide a context for ethnic affairs reforms.

Section 3 of the Report outlines the key elements of the Government's Ethnic Affairs Action Plan 2000. It begins by describing the roles of the State Government in ethnic affairs. It then describes the three key result areas and associated outcomes that all Government agencies will be expected to address. The implementation, monitoring and reporting arrangements required under the Action Plan are also described.

Section 4 of the Report describes the legislative and administrative changes which will be needed to implement the Ethnic Affairs Action Plan 2000. It then describes what additional resources will be made available to Government agencies, how the reforms will be evaluated, and the timeline for implementing the reforms.

Following the Attachments, an Appendix is provided which contains a detailed description of the demographic trends in NSW including tables containing statistical information drawn from the 1991 Census.

CONCLUSION: BACKGROUND TO THE REVIEW

This Report of the Review of the Ethnic Affairs Commission Act represents a whole-of-Government approach to ethnic affairs. The Ethnic Affairs Action Plan 2000 presents clear priorities for action by the NSW Government and its agencies. It sets out the procedures all State Government agencies will be required to undertake now, and over the coming years, to ensure the benefits of cultural diversity can be realised. It also identifies public reporting procedures which will enable the people of New South Wales to monitor ethnic affairs achievements annually.

It is hoped that the implementation of this Report will assist New South Wales to build on its cultural diversity to become a sophisticated, cosmopolitan and economically diversified society.