

# Multicultural Western Australia



Office of Multicultural Interests  
Government of Western Australia

Newsletter of the Office of Multicultural Interests (OMI)

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## Ministerial Council on Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (MCIMA)

MCIMA consists of Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers and is currently chaired by the Hon Kevin Andrews, Minister for Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). Representatives from Norfolk Island, New Zealand and the Australian Local Government Association also attend. The purpose of MCIMA is to provide a forum to discuss policies and strategies on aspects of immigration, settlement, citizenship and multicultural affairs, across the Commonwealth, State and Territory, and local governments. MCIMA meets once each year to consider and resolve issues of mutual concern.

This year MCIMA met on 6 July 2007 in Townsville, Queensland, to discuss a range of issues. A summary of some of the key matters discussed are included in this Newsletter. Other issues considered included use of ethnic descriptors by police, accountability of service providers in the provision of culturally and linguistically appropriate residential aged care, ethnic community radio broadcasting and skilled migration.

Western Australia will host the MCIMA meeting in 2008.

## English Language

DIAC has convened an Inter-Departmental Committee to look at ways to improve Commonwealth Government English language programs. Western Australia believes that there is a need for information about Adult Migrant Education Program outcomes to be more widely available to determine the level of success of current approaches.

Western Australia raised with MCIMA the need for additional resources to address the needs of students who have extremely low education levels; smaller classes to help teachers address the needs of individual students, more funding for childcare and better information about the range of programs available. There is also a need to look at different English language teaching methods, and make sure that programs link together in a better way that the necessary supports are provided at each step.

Western Australia also recognises the value of non-accredited training delivery that provides a non-threatening pathway into accredited training for those who may be intimidated by, and unaccustomed to, formal training environments and methods of delivery. Community groups and volunteer programs continue to experience a huge demand for additional and flexible delivery of English language classes, and their resources are increasingly stretched to meet the need.

An update on the progress made by the Inter-Departmental Committee will be provided at the next meeting of the Standing Committee on Immigration and Multicultural Affairs to be held later this year.



Back row (left to right): Hon Kevin Andrews MP, Mr John Hargreaves MLA, Hon Theresa Gambaro MP, Hon Daniel Andrews MP, Councillor Col Sullivan and Hon Michael Atkinson MP.

Front row (left to right): Hon Ljiljana Ravlich MLC, Hon Lindy Nelson-Carr MP, Hon Michelle O'Byrne, and Hon Barbara Perry MP.

## Support for Multiculturalism

On 23 January 2007 the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) officially changed its name to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), following the swearing in of the Hon Kevin Andrews as Minister for Immigration and Citizenship. Four States, including Western Australia, raised concerns regarding this change of name, in particular, its implications for the Commonwealth Government's stance on the role of multiculturalism in Australian society, and the future of Australia's immigration policy.

These concerns, shared by community organisations across Australia, focus on the potential impact of an official name change on public perception of the importance of multiculturalism, and its contribution to Australia's economic and social wellbeing.

The Commonwealth Government responded by confirming its commitment to a multicultural society which promotes the sharing of cultures, participation and recognising strength in cultural diversity.

### The Social Costs and Benefits of Migration into Australia Report

This Report is a product of the Research Advisory Committee of MCIMA. The Report is available on the DIAC Website and can be accessed at [www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/research/social-costs-benefits/index.htm](http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/research/social-costs-benefits/index.htm)

## Update on Testing of Australian Citizenship, including English Language

On 11 December 2006 the Commonwealth Government announced that it would introduce a citizenship test. The new arrangements will require applicants to sign a statement indicating that they understand the requirements for citizenship and Australian values, and accept the rights and responsibilities of Australian citizenship.

The proposal includes a compulsory test that contains questions on Australian values, customs, laws and history, and a doubling of the citizenship application fee to \$240. The test will be available in an alternate format for applicants with low English language skills.

Western Australia expressed strong concerns that the test would be a costly and ineffective method of testing people's commitment to Australia or assisting their integration and full participation in Australian society. Western Australia is of the view that the money set aside for the citizenship test would be better spent providing additional settlement services, English language training and employment assistance for newly arrived migrants, particularly humanitarian entrants.

Unfortunately, the Commonwealth Government is committed to the introduction of the Test and has introduced legislation into the Commonwealth Parliament to allow for one to be created.

## Housing Issues for Humanitarian Entrants

Whilst housing stress as a result of the current economic boom in Western Australia affects the whole community, it is causing particular difficulties for the most vulnerable groups in society. Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Service (IHSS) providers, housing advocates and community groups have advised the Western Australian Government they are finding it extremely difficult to secure affordable housing for humanitarian entrants.

Western Australia asked MCIMA to support the need for increased rental assistance, and the establishment of increased housing assistance services for people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) backgrounds. Western Australia also asked the MCIMA to support the efforts of DIAC towards providing humanitarian entrants with initial 12-month housing leases under the IHSS, and to identify a process for assisting humanitarian entrants to secure housing after the IHSS period finishes.

MCIMA agreed to draw housing issues in relation to humanitarian entrants to the attention of the Commonwealth Government, and State/Territory Ministers responsible for housing and, in particular, that the Chair write to the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs in relation to public and private housing availability and the indexing of rental assistance, outlining the particular issues being experienced by humanitarian entrants in search of long-term accommodation.

MCIMA also agreed to the establishment of a Working Party involving state and territory government and sector representatives, chaired by DIAC, to work together within the scope of IHSS to examine options to improve access to appropriate and affordable housing.

## 457 Class Visas

On 14 July 2006, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed that governments would work to strengthen the integrity of the Subclass 457 (temporary business – long stay) visa arrangements, while maintaining the benefits of the temporary skilled migration program and ensuring employers had smooth access to it. Western Australia was responsible for raising this issue at the 2006 MCIMA meeting through a paper prepared by the Department of Consumer and Employment Protection (DOCEP) and submitted by OMI.

To progress this, MCIMA referred the issue to the Commonwealth/State Working Party on Skilled Migration (CSWP), which in December 2006 provided a progress report to COAG on the proposed reforms and the position of State and Territory Governments. COAG considered the report and released it for consultations with key stakeholders during February and March 2007. In general, submissions called for greater sanctions against sponsoring employers who abused the scheme, as well as preferential arrangements for compliant employers to bring in skilled overseas workers more swiftly.

CSWP met in Melbourne on 7- 8 June 2007 to consider the submissions and to seek Commonwealth/State agreement on further revisions to the endorsed recommendations. The Small Business Development Corporation (the lead WA body on migration issues), the Labour Relations Division of DOCEP and OMI represented the WA Government at the meeting, at which DIAC advised its intention to seek additional money for State-based DIAC offices to monitor sponsoring employers; greater powers to investigate workplaces without notice; and the introduction of more comprehensive surveys of 457 visa holders about their working conditions.

At the 2007 MCIMA meeting, the Council noted the progress made on most of the recommendations put forward by CSWP, and endorsed CSWP's continuation of its work to ensure the integrity of the 457 visa program.

## National Action Plan to Build on Social Cohesion, Harmony and Security

In the aftermath of the 7 July 2005 London bombings and recent experience of international terrorism, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), requested that MCIMA develop a National Action Plan (NAP).

The purpose of the NAP is to reinforce social cohesion and harmony and to support the national security imperative in Australia. The key focus areas are: education, employment, integrating communities, and enhancing national security. MCIMA has agreed to the public release of NAP.

Initiatives undertaken by the Office of Multicultural Interests as part of the NAP include the Inclusion and Integration Grants Program, Community Relations and Integration Officer (CRIO) Program and the Youth Sports Program.

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