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2020-21 State Budget Community Consultation

Department of Treasury and Finance

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Multicultural Council of Tasmania submission to 2020-21 State Budget Community Consultation

The Multicultural Council of Tasmania (MCOT) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Tasmanian Government for the 2020-21 State Budget.

MCOT is the peak body representing more than 60 multicultural organisations in Tasmania.

Tasmania's economy and society are enriched by the contribution of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) Tasmanians.

Current State Government policy supports this contribution. MCOT appreciates this existing support and requests that this support continue.

At the same time, policy can be improved to increase the ability of CALD Tasmanians to contribute to Tasmania's economy and society. These improvements can involve changes to State Government policy on regulation, revenue and government spending.

Regulation

The State Government is responsible for occupational licensing and can unilaterally change occupational licensing policy in Tasmania.

CALD Tasmanians are more likely than other Tasmanians to have qualifications obtained outside of Tasmania. Improved recognition of these qualifications will increase the contribution of CALD Tasmanians to Tasmania's economy and society.

The State Government should automatically recognise qualifications recognised in other Australian States and Territories. This would improve the productivity of existing Tasmanians and encourage migration to Tasmania of skilled workers currently residing in other Australian States and Territories. It would also allow reduced government spending in bodies such as Consumer, Building and Occupational Licensing that currently devote resources to deciding whether a person with a qualification recognised elsewhere in the federation should be granted a Tasmanian licence and allowed to practise their vocation in Tasmania.

The State Government should improve the recognition of qualifications obtained outside Australia. The Office of Tasmanian Assessment, Standards and Certification provides a free service to determine whether a range of qualifications obtained outside Australia should be recognised as equivalent to an Australian qualification. However, some qualifications are currently beyond the scope of that Office. In these circumstances, the decision about whether to recognise a qualification obtained overseas generally falls to an industry body. This is a concern, as industry bodies serve incumbent providers and have an incentive to prevent the entry of new providers. The State Government should consider removing the responsibility of industry bodies for deliberating on qualifications obtained overseas. This should be done even where the industry body is undertaking this responsibility under Commonwealth legislation, as there is no explicit Constitutional head of power for the Commonwealth Government to undertake occupational licensing.

The State Government should also reassess the need for licences in low-risk occupations, such as motor vehicle trading. Removing the need for licences in low-risk occupations would remove the need for government to assess overseas qualifications relevant to these occupations. It could also increase the availability and reduce the cost of services provided by these occupations.

Revenue

Each year the State Government collects more than \$380 million in transaction taxes when Tasmanians buy property, motor vehicles and insurance.

This discourages sensible purchases like insurance, arbitrarily imposes tax on some Tasmanians and not others, and creates considerable complexity given the different rates, thresholds and exemptions that apply. CALD Tasmanians can be particularly disadvantaged by unnecessary complexity in the tax system. New Tasmanians are more likely than settled Tasmanians to not yet own their own home and be saving for a deposit to buy a home.

For these reasons, the State Government should reduce its reliance on transaction taxes and increase its reliance on less avoidable taxes. For instance, the exemption of principal places of residence from land tax — an exemption valued at more than \$130 million annually — could be gradually withdrawn.

Government spending

The contribution of CALD Tasmanians to Tasmania's economy and society is supported by spending by the State Government across a range of portfolios.

Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management

Services by Tasmania Police are fundamental to ensuring that CALD Tasmanians are free to contribute to Tasmania's economy and society.

Tasmanians who have migrated to Australia have often had negative experiences of police and people in authority prior to their arrival in Australia. This may come to be fearful of, and mistrust, police and people in authority. Some CALD Tasmanians can feel stigmatised by police and people in authority. There are few opportunities for people of multicultural backgrounds to meet, mix and connect with police to build trust, understanding and strong relationships. Further, people from multicultural backgrounds are under-represented in Tasmania Police.

Police forces in other jurisdictions include civilian staff employed as Multicultural Community Liaison Officers to ensure that police understand the policing concerns of CALD Australians and that CALD Australians understand that the police are committed to serving the entire community including CALD Australians.

The State Government should commit \$300,000 annually to the recruitment and retention of two Multicultural Community Liaison Officers, one serving Southern Tasmania and one serving the North. This commitment would be in line with the 33 Multicultural Community Liaison Officers employed by the police force in New South Wales, whose population is fifteen times that of Tasmania.

Department of Communities Tasmania

The Multicultural Council of Tasmania appreciates the funding it receives under the budget of the Department of Communities Tasmania, and is committed to efficiently using the funding it receives to serve multicultural communities and promote social cohesion for the benefit of all Tasmanians.

More broadly, State Government spending on multicultural affairs in Tasmania falls short of spending in other jurisdictions.

For instance, this financial year the Victorian State Government is spending \$59.2 million on multicultural affairs policy and programs. This spending includes \$27 million on multicultural aged care facilities, \$7 million on community language schools, \$17 million for multicultural organisations and events (including grants for places of worship, multicultural senior citizens organisations, and media equipment), and \$3 million for multicultural policy delivery (including an anti-racism action plan and projects to improve social cohesion and reduce racism, discrimination and social division).

The increased spending in other jurisdictions reflects their larger size. For instance, scaling down the Victorian State Government's spending on multicultural affairs policy and programs to reflect Tasmania's smaller population would imply \$4.8 million of spending, including \$2.2 million on multicultural aged care facilities, \$0.7 million on community language schools, \$1.4 million on multicultural organisations and events, and \$0.2 million on multicultural policy delivery such as anti-racism and social cohesion projects.

Each of these components of state government spending on multicultural affairs are warranted in the Tasmanian context. For instance, spending on multicultural aged care in Tasmania should at least match such spending in other jurisdictions, given that Tasmania's population is older than the population of other jurisdictions.

- Those for whom English is their second language may find their English language skills deteriorate in old age. This suggests that, to ensure quality aged care for all, there will be an increased need for aged care services in languages other than English.

It could be argued that spending per capita on multicultural affairs in Tasmania need not align with spending per capita in other jurisdictions, as the proportion of Tasmania's population that is culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse is lower than the proportion in other jurisdictions. However, even if we were to scale back our recommended spending on multicultural affairs to account for Tasmania's relatively low CALD population, the recommended spending would still far exceed current spending levels. Moreover, Tasmania's relatively low attraction and retention of culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse communities could in part be a result of the relatively low spending per capita on multicultural affairs.

Various new initiatives could be included in the recommended annual spend of \$1.6 million on multicultural organisations, events and policy delivery:

- A six-monthly Tasmanian Multicultural Forum, convened by MCOT in conjunction with the Minister's Office and the Department of Communities Tasmania. The Forum could be modelled on the forums organised by the youth sector peak, the Youth Network of Tasmania, and alternate between Launceston and Hobart. The Forum would allow communities and leaders to respond to existing policies and programs and propose new policies and programs. (Required resources: Project Officer, 8 hrs/wk for 52 wks \$15,200; Administration, office costs and support \$2,300; Travel \$2,500; Total \$20,000pa).
- More widespread Harmony Week Tasmania, with a dedicated coordinator strengthening relationships across Local Governments, communities and organisations, gaining further private sector sponsors, and overseeing casual staff in the North and North West in the weeks leading up to and including Harmony Week. (Required resources: Coordinator, 30 hrs/wk for 20 wks \$25,300; Casual staff in Launceston and North West \$7,500; Website, communications and promotional materials \$5,000; Statewide events - small grants \$8,000; Administration, office costs and support \$6,200; Travel \$3,000; Total \$55,000pa).



- Develop the organisational competence of multicultural organisations, assisting them with strategic planning, fundraising frameworks, maintaining strong governance, satisfying compliance requirements, and engaging younger people as leaders of the organisation. (Required resources: Sector Development Officer, 7.5 hrs/wk x 52 wks \$14,500; Administration, office costs and support \$2,500; Travel \$4,000; Total \$21,000pa).
- A Multicultural Women's Circle based on the Wodonga model for women and mothers from multicultural backgrounds to meet weekly for two hours during Tasmanian school terms, with gatherings including information sessions on education and employment pathways, women's health and well-being, yoga, mindfulness and art, and with a child care worker at each session to supervise children. (Required resources: Sector Development Officer, 7.5 hrs/wk x 52 wks \$14,500; Activities, events and catering, \$250/wk x 40 weeks \$10,000; Administration, office costs and support \$3,500, Total \$28,000).
- Extended Welcoming Cities and Communities advocacy and support to increase impetus on local government areas beyond Greater Hobart to deliver their existing services in a way conducive to the attraction and retention of potential new entrants to the area. (Required resources: Coordinator based in Launceston, 30 hrs/wk for 52 wks \$65,000; Administration, office costs and support \$10,000; Travel \$6,000; Total \$81,000pa).
- Support for more widespread multicultural arts, sports and food festivals, consistent with Glenorchy City Council's annual Taste of Moonah event and Clarence City Council's biennial World Games, and at a far-reduced cost compared to the million-dollar festivals organised in other jurisdictions (such as the annual, three-day National Multicultural Festival in Canberra), with grants to be contested by local government councils and not-for-profit organisations across the State. (Required resources: three \$15,000 grants and ten \$3,000 grants; Total \$75,000pa).

Summary: Multicultural Council of Tasmania 2020-21 budget proposal

Regulatory reform to increase contributions from those with qualifications obtained overseas.

Increase land tax on principal places of residence and reduce transactions taxes.

Recruit two Police Multicultural Community Liaison Officers: \$300,000.

Multicultural Affairs spending (based on Victorian State Government 2019-20 expense, scaled to Tasmania's population):

Multicultural aged care facilities: \$2.2 million.

Community language schools: \$0.7 million.

Multicultural organisations, events and policy delivery: \$1.6 million.

Total: \$4.5 million.

Recommended inclusions in \$1.6 million spend on multicultural organisations, events and policy delivery:

Tasmanian Multicultural Forum: \$20,000.

More widespread Harmony Week Tasmania: \$55,000.

Organisational competence of multicultural organisations: \$21,000.

Multicultural Women's Circle \$28,000.

Extended Welcoming Cities and Communities advocacy and support: \$81,000.

More widespread multicultural arts, sports and food festivals: \$75,000.

Total of recommended inclusions: \$280,000.