

19 November 2019

Senator the Hon Kim Carr
Chair
Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Senator,

Multicultural Council of Tasmania – submission – Nationhood Inquiry

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry into nationhood, national identity and democracy.

The Multicultural Council of Tasmania is the peak body representing more than 60 multicultural organisations in Tasmania.

Commonwealth Government functions

Many of the concepts being considered by the inquiry, such as nationhood, cultural identity and social cohesion, are not particularly within the control of the Commonwealth Government. It may do more harm than good for the Commonwealth Government to attempt to directly influence these concepts. The Commonwealth Government should nonetheless consider concepts such as nationhood, cultural identity and social cohesion:

1. when determining whether it is best placed to undertake a particular function, and
2. when determining how to carry out a particular function.

1. What should the Commonwealth Government do

The Commonwealth Government should consider concepts such as nationhood, cultural identity and social cohesion when determining whether it is best placed to undertake community development programs.

Such consideration could lead to the conclusion that the best prospect for community development programs to have a positive impact on nationhood, cultural identity and social cohesion is if they are determined by state and local government rather than the Commonwealth Government.

- The Democracy 2025 report cited by the Committee indicates that trust in the Commonwealth Government falls short of trust in state and local government.
- State and local politicians are better placed to discern and respond to the needs of individuals and communities, as the electorates of state and local politicians are smaller.
- There is no particular efficiency in community development programs being determined by the Commonwealth Government.
- Having community development programs determined by state and local governments makes it easier for programs to be tailored to particular circumstances.

The same reasoning suggests that other policies that affect nationhood, cultural identity and social cohesion, such as education policy, could be determined by state and local government rather than the Commonwealth Government.

Consideration of nationhood, cultural identity and social cohesion could lead to a conclusion that certain policies should not be pursued at all, whether at a Commonwealth, state or local level. For instance, social cohesion is reinforced when Australians engage and build relations with other Australians. This operation of civil society can involve:

- meeting new people in a public place or a club and sharing food and drink;
- offering to drive strangers around town or having them stay at your place;
- getting strangers to do something for you and doing something for them in return; and
- neighbours caring for each other's children, elderly relatives and disabled relatives.

If the regulation of associations, public events, food and liquor, the sharing economy, the workplace, trade practices, child care, aged care and disability services supports these interactions, then this regulation supports social cohesion. But if this regulation makes these voluntary interactions more difficult and less likely, then it undermines social cohesion.

2. How should the Commonwealth Government carry out its functions

Immigration and citizenship policies need to be determined by the Commonwealth Government. The Commonwealth Government should consider nationhood, cultural identity and social cohesion when determining how to carry out its immigration and citizenship policies.

- Social cohesion is supported by each migrant having access to appropriate settlement services. These services need not be determined, funded and delivered by the Commonwealth Government — this function may lie best with state and local government.
- Social cohesion is more likely from permanent rather than temporary migration.
- Government should not have the power to revoke citizenship against a citizen's will. Revocation is an extreme act, because if a person's citizenship is revoked, his or her right to remain in, or to come to, Australia can be removed. A power to revoke citizenship undermines certainty for all citizens.
- Government should not have the power to deny or delay entry to Australia for Australian citizens. Such a power undermines certainty for all citizens.
- Citizens should have equal rights, including the right to run for Commonwealth Parliament. Running for Commonwealth Parliament can reinforce a person's engagement in Australian society, so denying certain Australian citizens the right to run for Commonwealth Parliament means we are wasting opportunities to reinforce social cohesion.

The Multicultural Council of Tasmania would be happy to elaborate on this submission and looks forward to the Committee's report.

Yours sincerely,

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