

Modern Australia is a multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-faith nation that is no longer an outpost of Europe and has moved closer to Asia. We live in an outwardly secular society, yet paradoxically it is also one where most of the Australian population embraces some sort of faith affiliation. Faith, religion and spirituality strongly influence individual and group identity; the embrace of multiculturalism; and commitment to the greater whole has been fashioned and by the spiritual vision of the major faith communities. In our multicultural nation, cultures and religions which were once isolated from one another are coming into closer contact; and ideas and concepts which were once considered foreign and distant are becoming well-known and accepted. As evidenced in the most recent Census of 2021, Australia is becoming more religiously diverse. In recent decades while there has been a steady decline in the percentage of Australians who identified an affiliation with Christianity there has been an increase in affiliation with non-Christian faiths: particularly Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. This trend has been largely shaped and characterised by the waves and patterns of migration to Australia from the Middle East, Southeast Asia and Africa. There is a tradition in Australia of strong government recognition and support for ethnic associations and multicultural peak bodies. Faith affiliation is extremely important for many migrant communities as it offers spiritual comfort, companionship, moral guidance, hope and a sense of belonging and familiarity for new settlers in multicultural Australia. It is recommended that the role of national and state-based faith-based organisations and multi-faith peak bodies in fostering religious harmony and interreligious dialogue in Australia should similarly be recognised and adequately supported by the Federal Government. It is believed that through embracing the multi-faith perspective, the Federal Government can more effectively communicate and engage with multicultural Australia.