

Multicultural Australia:
What it is and what it can and should be

A Submission
to
THE MULTICULTURAL FRAMEWORK REVIEW

by

Professor Emeritus Joseph A. Camilleri OAM

19 September 2023

Executive Summary

1. In the space of a few decades Australia has become a remarkably cosmopolitan and dynamic society, owing primarily to the large influx of both permanent migrant and temporary visitors.
2. Australia's multicultural fabric represents an asset of immense value to Australia.
3. If properly managed and resourced, Australia's cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity can contribute to six national priorities:
 - Social harmony and cohesion
 - Better educational outcomes
 - A more productive workforce
 - A more effective trading performance
 - A coherent and comprehensive security policy
 - A better focused regional and global role.
4. If multiculturalism means anything, it means taking full advantage of Australia's rich and still largely untapped cultural diversity. A serious approach to innovation requires Australian governments to actively support and at least partially fund a wide range of intercultural learning programs tailored to the needs of key constituencies, notably business managers, police and security personnel, community welfare providers, prison workers, youth workers, teachers, administrators and chaplains in schools, colleges and universities, as well as lawyers and health professionals.
5. The Australian Government should proceed with some urgency to establish a National Centre for Intercultural Diversity. Its mission would be to advance knowledge and innovation as it relates to managing cultural and religious diversity – within Australia and in Australia's relations with its region and beyond. While maintaining its independence, the Centre would cultivate productive partnerships with government, business and community, as well as with other research centres and think tanks and with international organisations.
6. The growth of 'interfaith dialogue' was one of the most positive developments in the wake of the post-September 11 environment. But over the last ten years, interfaith dialogue has generally languished for lack of innovation and adequate support from key sections of society, including governments, educational institutions, religious organisations and the media. In consultation with relevant stakeholders, the Federal Government should take concrete steps, including review of grant making criteria, to assist the further development in Australia of an inclusive and sustainable interfaith movement. An important initiative in this next phase will be the convening of a national conference to evaluate the achievements and failures of the last twenty years, and importantly pave the way for innovative initiatives in the period ahead.
7. A well coordinated national strategy is needed to advance the study of languages other than English in the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors of Australian education. Such a strategy should be adopted as a major plank of Australia's multicultural policies and programs. Government, working closely with educational providers, industry and the professions, should make available to teachers, parents and students far greater incentives for the teaching and learning of languages.

Australian multiculturalism is growing by the day. The evidence is all around us: community language schools, ethnic media, ethnic businesses, the changing face of our universities, diverse religious practices and places of worship, and the rich variety in cultural activities – in food, fashion, music, art and architecture. migration.

Permanent and temporary immigration

Australia's multicultural fabric is directly related to the growing number of migrants who have come to Australia from all parts of the world, more recently in increasing numbers from Asian, Middle Eastern and African countries.

The table below shows the radical change that has occurred since Federation:

Top 10 countries of birth, 1901 and 2021 censuses

1901 Census			2021 Census		
Country of birth	Number	%*	Country of birth	Number	%*
1 United Kingdom	495 074	13.1	1 United Kingdom	1,152,740	4.5
2 Ireland	184 085	4.9	2 India	710,380	2.8
3 Germany	38 352	1.0	3 China	700,620	2.8
4 China	29 907	0.8	4 New Zealand	559,980	2.2
5 New Zealand	25 788	0.7	5 Philippines	310,620	1.2
6 Sweden & Norway	9 863	0.3	6 Vietnam	268,170	1.0
7 India	7 637	0.2	7 South Africa	201,930	0.8
8 United States	7 448	0.2	8 Malaysia	172,250	0.7
9 Denmark	6 281	0.2	9 Italy	171,520	0.7
10 Italy	5 678	0.2	10 Sri Lanka	145,790	0.6
Top 10 total	810 113	21.5	Top 10 total	4,894,000	17.1
Other	47 463	1.3	Other	2,608,450	11.7
Total overseas born	857 576	22.8	Total overseas born	7,502,450	29.4
Total Australian population	3 773 801	100.0	Total Australian population	25,422,788	100.0

* Percentage of total population

But even these figures do not convey the extent of the diversity in terms of the countries represented in the migration intake of recent years, or how quickly this diversity has grown in the last decade. In 2021, six of the top ten countries of birth in Australia's resident population were from Asia.

It is worth noting, however, that despite the steady stream of arrivals from non-European countries, no single African, Middle Eastern or Asian community represents as yet a significantly large minority in Australia (as is for example the case in a country like Malaysia, where the Chinese and Indian minorities constitute 24% and 7% of the total population respectively).

As of 2021 the largest non-English speaking communities in Australia were from India and China, but each represent only 2.8% of the total population. What this means is that no single non-English

speaking minority in Australia has the demographic muscle which can challenge the dominance of established cultural traditions and institutions.

If, however, we consider not country of birth but religious affiliation, the picture is somewhat different and more complex. One religious faith, namely Islam, has grown considerably in recent years and has captured a good deal of media and political attention. The number of Muslims in Australia has risen from 2,704 in 1947 to 22,311 in 1971, 476,291 in 2011 census, and 813,392 in 2021, which represents is 3.2% of the Australian population.

The trend is even more pronounced if we look at trends in religion in terms of age. Whereas the average age of those who identify as Christians is 51 (well above the average of Australia as a whole), in the case of Islam it is only 27. Over time, Australia's Muslim population will continue to grow in absolute and relative terms – a trend that is also evident in many European countries.

In assessing the significant changes that have occurred in Australia's cultural fabric, it is also important to take account of the scale and nature of temporary (and not just permanent) migration.

People may enter Australia on a temporary basis under the temporary residence program, whether as visitors, students or for a range of specialised purposes. Temporary entrants include:

- tourists
- students
- business people for short stays
- people with specialist skills, such as managers, academics and medical practitioners
- people who make a social or cultural contribution to the community, such as entertainers, media and film staff, sports people, religious workers, visiting academics
- people who contribute to the development of international relations, such as diplomatic personnel, participants in exchange programs and working holiday makers.

Temporary migration matters in multicultural terms because much of it is drawn from non-English speaking countries. This is especially the case with international students because the bulk of these come from Asia. What makes this a highly significant trend is the rapid rise in the number of international students, and the increasingly important contribution which international education makes to Australia's export income.

According to the latest statistics of December 2022, most international students in Australia come from China, with 156,217 students, followed by India, with 100,302 international students.

Country of Origin	Number of International Students
China	156,217
India	100,302
Nepal	57,182
Colombia	22,662
Vietnam	22,521
Thailand	19,362
Brazil	19,057
Philippines	17,976
Indonesia	16,914
Pakistan	15,875

*The table above shows January–December 2022 data.

Taken together these trends point to a rapidly changing cultural landscape. They suggest that Australia's economy as well as its social, educational and professional life will be increasingly influenced by the cultures, religions, languages and traditions that are reaching Australia through its permanent and temporary migration programs.

Multiculturalism: An invaluable asset

Governments at Federal, State and Municipal level have all come to recognise that the large immigration program as it has evolved since the Second World War has enormously benefited Australia. Immigration policy, it is true, has at times been controversial, especially during periods of economic downturn. In 2002, a CSIRO population study entitled *Future Dilemmas*, commissioned by the then Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, outlined a number of potential dilemmas associated with immigration-driven population growth, notably in relation to Australia's trade balance, impact on the environment, and social policy.

Though all these are important considerations which must be taken into account when determining population policy, and in particular appropriate rates of population growth, there can be little doubt that Australia's multicultural fabric represents an asset of immense value to Australia. However, as with all assets, the value to be derived from our ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity depends ultimately on how the asset is understood, managed, and nurtured.

The objectives of immigration and multicultural policies are many and diverse. This submission focuses on key tasks that are critical to the future development of Australian multiculturalism.

The fact that multiculturalism has been openly embraced by all major parties is a positive development, but there is still much that can be done to enrich and give added depth to our understanding and practice of multiculturalism.

Enhancing the safety and security of the nation and strengthening its democratic values and institutions are critically important objectives. But what we understand by these values and objectives and how we are to achieve them are the proper subject of periodic review in the light of changing circumstances. Multiculturalism necessarily bears on how we understand and give effect to the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

We can no doubt benefit greatly from sharing the values that unite us, but there is also much to gain from the rich insights, aspirations and know-how that come with the different cultures, traditions, faiths and languages represented in Australian society. It is by developing this dual approach that we can most creatively manage Australia's irreplaceable asset that is its cultural diversity.

Wise harnessing of this asset can deliver rich returns with respect to six key objectives:

- ***Social harmony and cohesion*** (at times threatened by local prejudice and extremism or international tensions and conflicts);
- ***Better educational outcomes*** (through more systematic nurturing of our enormous reservoir of linguistic, cultural, technical and organisational skills and competencies);
- ***A more productive workforce*** (through the careful fostering of culturally sensitive workplace conditions and practices);
- ***A more effective trading performance*** (through a range of incentives designed to help businesses develop culturally sophisticated human resource, promotional, product design, marketing and negotiating strategies);

- **A coherent and comprehensive security policy** (that is tailored to the cultural needs and potential of Australian society and sensitive to the cultural traditions and preferences of our trading, security and diplomatic partners);
- **A better focused regional and global role** (that takes full advantage of the potential for intercultural dialogue and cooperation – a key but often neglected pillar of bilateral relationships, regional cooperation, and a crucial plank for deepening Australia’s commitment to and participation in the UN system and other multilateral institutions and negotiating forums).

This submission draws attention to four key areas which offer unique opportunities for innovative institutional and policy initiatives over the next several years in line with the six priorities outlined above.

Intercultural training

A number of programs run or supported by government at the Federal, State and Municipal level are helping to enhance appreciation of cultural diversity, civic values and inter-religious and intercultural harmony. Yet, relatively few programs are specifically or adequately designed to enhance levels of intercultural awareness, or what may be termed higher levels of intercultural skilling. Yet, such programs would be enormously valuable, especially if they are well tailored to the needs and circumstances of particular constituencies. Several constituencies immediately suggest themselves:

- business managers
- police and security forces
- community welfare providers
- prison workers
- youth workers
- teachers, administrators and chaplains in schools, colleges and universities
- other key professions, including lawyers and doctors

This is not a comprehensive list, yet it is indicative of the different contexts where those in positions of responsibility are dealing on a daily basis with a range of cultures, languages, religions, and social and ethical preferences and traditions. To perform their tasks effectively and responsibly they need a firm grasp of the culturally diverse context within which they are working both in Australia and in their dealings overseas. Within an increasingly globalised world the demand for intercultural skills will continue to grow. In Australia’s case, enduring business, professional and technological partnerships have to be built on deep and respectful appreciation of the rich cultural wealth of our Asian and Pacific neighbourhood. Australia’s multicultural fabric presents a unique asset for making these fruitful connections.

Knowledge and understanding do not, however, grow spontaneously. They have to be carefully nurtured through a range of intercultural training programs.

It follows therefore that an effective approach to innovation should, among other things, encourage, support and fund the research, educational and training institutions and projects that foster this deeper ‘cultural’ knowledge and understanding. Such an approach has wide-ranging

application in several key areas of policy, in particular industry, trade, education, health, external relations, security, and, of course, indigenous affairs,¹ immigration and multicultural affairs.

To make this possible three things are needed:

- a) Strategically selected forms of national and international networking and collaboration that effectively mobilise intercultural knowledge and understanding;
- b) Careful identification of research and training priorities around themes that give due prominence to cultural knowledge and management of cultural diversity (including diversity of languages);
- c) A more systematic attempt to identify international best practice in these areas of study, research, training and educational organisation.

A National Centre for Intercultural Diversity

To respond effectively to these needs the Federal Government should consider developing a few strategic instruments. A National Centre for Intercultural Diversity would be one such instrument. Its mission would be to advance knowledge and innovation as it relates to managing cultural and religious diversity – first and foremost within Australia, but also in Australia's relations with its region and beyond. Its primary focus would be on the practical implications of cultural diversity for social cohesion, economy and trade, environment, education (at all levels), media and communications, national security, and international relations.

The Centre would make use of Australia's multicultural assets to endow intercultural studies and programmes with a strong community focus. It would play a leadership role in research, education, the public conversation and policy development. Its underlying mission would be to explore how cultural diversity can be used to generate innovative research and training programs that support prosperity, conflict resolution and a safe national and international environment.

The Centre would also focus on intercultural relations as they impact on Australia's engagement with Asia (both East Asia and South Asia), the Pacific and the Middle East, as well as with traditional areas of interest in Europe and North America.

One of the Centre's key aims would be to engage young people, and explore ways in which cultural diversity can enhance the quality of education and employment, and reduce alienation and extremism.

One option would be for the Centre to be hosted by either one university or a consortium of universities, selected through a competitive process open to all Australian universities. The successful university(ies) should ideally be located in a city and region noted for its cultural diversity, partnerships and international connections.

While maintaining its independence, the Centre would cultivate productive partnerships with:

- a) community organisations (both within Australia and internationally)
- b) the business community, professional bodies and unions
- c) government at all levels (Municipal, State and Federal)
- d) regional and international organisations
- e) other research institutions nationally and internationally
- f) philanthropic organisations.

¹ This submission does not deal with the crucial question of the languages, cultures, and spirituality of our First Nations. Suffice it here to say that their contribution to all who have settled here is immeasurable. The wisdom inherent in the long history of our Indigenous communities is central to what it means to be Australian. It should form an integral part of how migrant communities relate to their Indigenous brothers and sisters, and inform their understanding of the land we call Australia.

The Centre would be assisted by an Advisory Board whose membership would be representative of these constituencies, and which would help guide the Centre's research, educational, community engagement and policy development programs.

The Australian Government would provide funding over a five-year period to support the establishment of such a Centre. Government funding would cover infrastructure costs and a number of specified research, educational and training appointments. The successful institution(s) would provide the Centre with additional support.

Interfaith dialogue: The next phase

In the wake of the events of 11 September 2001, initiatives in dialogue generally and interfaith dialogue in particular became commonplace. Australia was no exception. Federal and State governments made funds available, meetings of religious leaders were convened, booklets and guidelines produced, and school and community projects initiated.

This was a timely antidote to the politics of fear and mistrust. There is no disputing the value of much that was attempted. But with the passing of time, the energy, enthusiasm and organisational support for this activity has waned considerably. Lip service was regularly paid to the importance of the dialogue of cultures and religions, but with remarkably little follow through not just on the part of government, but also on the part of religious, ethnic community organisations which became far more preoccupied with their own internal priorities. Yet, dialogue in its many forms remains an indispensable investment in Australia's future. To this end, several possibilities should be closely considered. Three are especially worthy of attention. To be successful such initiatives need to be pro-active, imaginatively designed, sustainable over time, and mutually reinforcing.

Avoiding the pitfalls of 'reaction'

Though interfaith dialogue is not new in Australia, it is the attacks of September 2001 and the Bali bombings of October 2002 which triggered the subsequent proliferation of interfaith activities. A study by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in 2003 listed over 101 projects, many of which were interfaith in nature. It is fair to say that many of these projects were motivated by a desire to moderate Islamic radicalism or to defuse actual or potential tensions of the kind that erupted in the 2005 Cronulla riots.

Muslim organisations were asked to enter into dialogue with their Christian and Jewish counterparts in the hope that such dialogue would be a useful antidote to militant radicalism or 'violent extremism'. A widely held assumption at the time was that radicalism was in the main to be found among Muslim communities. This has proved far too narrow an understanding of social cohesion on which to base the development of interfaith activity.

While the limitations of such a 'reactive' approach are now better understood, there is a clearly discernible tendency in some policy-making circles, in the wider society, and even among some dialogue practitioners to view interfaith activity in purely instrumental terms. Simply put, there is still too much emphasis on responding to perceived security threats or tensions, and too little on nurturing the creative possibilities of interfaith relations. Though dialogue can help put out, or at least contain, bushfires, this is not its primary function. Its long-term value to the community lies primarily in its contribution to higher levels of cultural literacy and intercultural cooperation.

Building more solid foundations

Religious organisations have been involved in interfaith relations, in the main through high-level meetings involving religious leaders or participation in peak bodies. Here, the initiative usually lies with those in positions of authority. At lower levels initiatives have also been taken, sometimes

with and at other times without the formal approval of the religious leadership. Official initiatives generally have been guarded when it comes to substance, and often confined to polite exchanges.

Another useful contribution has come from organisations whose primary purpose is to promote interfaith contact and cooperation, for example Religions for Peace, the Faith Communities Council of Victoria (FCCV) the Multifaith Association of South Australia, the Jewish-Christian-Muslim Association, and the Council of Christians and Jews. Other organisations that do not have an explicitly religious profile, but have played a significant role in promoting interfaith dialogue include the Australian Multicultural Foundation and the Centre for Dialogue at La Trobe University (2006-2014). Mention here must also be made of two Muslim-Turkish based organisations associated with the Gülen movement, Affinity Intercultural Foundation in Sydney and Australian Intercultural Society in Melbourne, which, have sponsored a wide range of high profile dialogue activities. In Victoria, a good number of organisations have strongly supported closer inter-faith relations, including the Victorian Council of Churches, the Islamic Council of Victoria, the Jewish Community Council of Victoria, the Uniting Church Synod Victoria & Tasmania: Uniting Through Faiths, and Pax Christi Victoria.

Perhaps the most positive development was the growth of local interfaith groups and networks. Some of which operated with varying degrees of municipal support. At its height, the movement in Victoria, where it was most highly developed, could boast close to 40 locally based networks. Since then, several of these groups have ceased to exist, or have lost a good deal of their momentum. Notable exceptions include the Dandenong interfaith Network and the Monash Interfaith Gathering.

Even when some of the projects carried out by these groups attracted government grants, completion of funded projects often did not yield any visible ongoing activity. Experience suggests that interfaith projects are more likely to prove sustainable if they are:

- a) sponsored or supported by organisations that have a long-term commitment to interfaith dialogue and are themselves prepared to invest resources in the projects in question,
- b) informed by, or seek to develop, a firm grasp of the philosophy, method and practice of dialogue; and
- c) have, regardless of their specific objectives and mode of operation, a clearly articulated educational and training component that widens the human resource pool needed to sustain the dialogical process over the longer term.

Government programs that seek to promote support interfaith activity are needed more than ever. But to be effective government programs need as a matter of urgency to integrate these principles into their brief, funding guidelines and evaluation processes.

Developing more effective communication

Even when the growth of interfaith groups, networks, initiatives and projects was at its peak, communication between them was at best irregular and poorly designed and resourced. The result has been inadequate sharing of knowledge and experience. Many similar projects around the country, including in the area of school education, were initiated with only the most limited sharing of information and monitoring and evaluation processes.

Closer and systematic liaison between organisations and initiatives would alleviate these problems. It would probably be useful if a highly respected and relatively well resourced organisation in each state could be invited to maintain an extensive database of interfaith organisations, projects, events and resources, and circulate these widely across that state. Government funding for this purpose for an initial three-year period would be an important step forward. Once effective clearing houses have been established, it should be possible to establish

a national network allowing for exchange of information and views across states, and in time the design, delivery and evaluation of national projects.

The 'next phase'

Most interfaith projects to date have concentrated on increasing knowledge and understanding of different faiths, that is, of their respective beliefs, texts and religious practices, including fasting and prayers. Visits have been organised to each other's places of worship and even homes. Many Mosques in Victoria and elsewhere have organised Open Days. Less frequently, joint prayer services and discussions have been organised. Much of this activity has served primarily a 'getting to know you' function, which is crucial and needs to continue.

However, it is time for more ambitious goals to be considered. There is as of now sufficient capacity, contacts and interest to go beyond the 'getting to know you' stage.

Building upon past experience, interfaith activity can foster a deeper and wide-ranging dialogue, in which participants

- Respect each other as persons;
- Celebrate the value and contribution of each other's faiths and cultures;
- Acknowledge that they do not hold a monopoly on wisdom and truth;
- Understand the importance of listening as well as speaking;
- Affirm the important ethical (and spiritual) values they share in common;
- Accept that there are differences, and that such differences are an invaluable source of mutual enrichment;
- Recognise that relations between different faiths, cultures and communities have at times given rise to mistrust, suspicion, hostility, even violence;
- Acknowledge and empathise with the pain and suffering of others – as a precondition to healing and reconciliation.

Such dialogue is most likely to flourish when interfaith relations are placed in the context of intercultural awareness. Put simply, Interfaith dialogue is most likely to flourish and prove durable when it is able to negotiate across both religious and cultural differences.

Much needs to be taken into account – not just the way we pray or fast, what we eat and how we dress, but also attitudes to authority, to personal relationships within and outside the family, to work and leisure. Dialogue needs to explore the deeper social, economic, physical and psychological insecurities that people experience – including the insecurities that arise from migration, whether voluntary or forced, and from marginalisation, isolation, and political conflict. The purpose of dialogue is to identify the sources of insecurity, and to find agreement on constructive ways of dealing with such insecurities.

In interfaith dialogue words need to be complemented by cooperative practical action to promote the common good.

In local settings, cooperation can take place around any number of issues: education, health, domestic violence, employment, environment, transport, assistance for new arrivals to the country, to name a few. A high priority should be to harness the energies and creativity of young people. Dialogue processes should speak to the needs and aspirations of young people, especially those who are Australian born and of non-English-speaking background, and who therefore face the difficult challenge of negotiating life across two cultures.

Where conditions are right, dialogue can also encourage discussion of complex social issues, be they local, national or international, including immigration policies, rights of migrant communities, women's rights, environmental concerns, the appropriate relationship between religion and the state, and Australia's relations with the outside world,

The importance of the international dimension cannot be overstated. With the growth of large migrant communities, from time to time there inevitably arise tensions and conflicts between particular religious, ethnic or political affiliations reflecting divisions associated with the country/ies of origin. Intercultural and interfaith dialogue, where it is already well established, can help prevent these tensions from taking root, and at the very least can serve as a calming influence.

From Australia's point of, dialogue offers a unique asset. Given the importance of immigration, refugee flows, trade, security relations, international education, and tourism, we have much to gain from developing our capacity to negotiate cultural and religious differences not just at home but abroad. Professional, school, religious, municipal and other exchange programs can play a key role in nurturing new patterns of understanding and cooperation. They can strengthen the intercultural fabric of Australian society, and add an important new pillar to Australia's engagement with Asia.

How might this next phase be given the impetus it needs? How might the energies and ideas of different groups, networks and projects attracted to this next phase of the journey reach a critical mass. One useful tool would be to stage a significant national interfaith/intercultural conference which brings together all relevant stakeholders. The Conference would seek to evaluate the achievements of the recent past and set broad priorities for the period ahead. It would seek to engage not just members of existing faith organisations, but people across the different faith traditions represented in Australia, and importantly community organisations which do not subscribe to a religious faith, but whose secular, humanist, rationalist worldview would make them excellent contributors to an 'inter-belief' dialogue centred on principles of social cohesion, responsible citizenship, and the dignity of the human person.

The Conference would be preceded by a carefully planned process of discussion and consultation, and pave the way for both new projects and new mechanisms of communication and coordination, which will be vital to the success of the next phase. With an appropriate lead-up and a creative follow up, the Conference would become a milestone in the growth of the Australian interfaith/intercultural movement.

Government would need to play a supporting but significant role for the staging of such a conference, as well as for the preparatory and follow-up stages. It should provide funding at different stages of the process, and assist where appropriate with building the necessary infrastructure. But care should be taken to ensure that government support in no way restricts the creativity of the Conference or the independence of the participating groups and organisations

Teaching and learning of languages

Language policy is too large and complex an issue to do justice to it in this submission. Here the focus is on the connection between multiculturalism and linguistic diversity. The consolidation of this diversity is integral to Australia's cultural heritage, in two important and complementary ways:

- a) Languages offer an indispensable window on the cultures that make up Australian society – languages are reflected in the literature, films, performing arts, music, print and electronic media, popular culture (shops, markets, bars, cafes and restaurants) of different cultures;
- b) Linguistic diversity is part of the rich mosaic that is our Australian multiculturalism – it is a living mirror of our ethnic, religious and cultural diversity. The learning of languages is a powerful tool that can facilitate intercultural awareness and help to heal tensions.

The learning of languages must therefore be seen as central to the preparation of Australians for *multicultural citizenship*.

Which languages? In principle all languages, both international and community languages can play a significant role. The distinction is in any case artificial. By virtue of its extraordinary migration history, Australia is now a microcosm of the world's languages – some 60 to 80 languages are widely spoken, and among these we find many of the world's most important languages. The major European languages (French, German, Spanish, Italian, Russian), Asian languages (Chinese, Hindi, and Bahasa Indonesia) and Arabic are all well represented in Australia.

Learning of languages is critical to the development of intercultural literacy, hence to greater social cohesion, and to more effective relationships with our trading and investment partners. It is sad but true that many of our current partners understand us much better than we understand them. Though this perception may not surface in polite conversation, entrepreneurs, bankers, merchants, diplomats, scientists, journalists, peacekeepers, teachers and others, who don't know the language of their counterparts, are often considered by them intellectually and culturally deficient.

Despite our extraordinary linguistic diversity, the survival of community languages is by no means assured – either quantitatively or qualitatively. Though a significant proportion of Australian homes communicate primarily in a language other than English, the transition from one generation to the next is proving difficult. The first generation of community languages (European) is experiencing considerable difficulty transmitting fluent use of the language from one generation to the next. Over a 10-year period (1991-2001), the use of European languages in Australian homes declined markedly: Italian declined by 15.6%; German 32.6%; Polish 11.8%; Maltese 21.9%; and French 12.9%. Asian languages and Arabic are generally doing better, but only because they have recently benefited from higher levels of migration. On past trends, we should expect the same outcome.

Unless the communities that have settled in Australia are able to retain proficiency in their respective languages, they will find it increasingly difficult to connect with their culture of birth – especially if the objective is to connect with a living culture that is constantly evolving in its social, intellectual, artistic and political forms. Here we have in mind not just the language and culture of 20, 50 or 100 years ago, but the language that is spoken and lived today in the countries where that language is the principal medium of communication. Here it should be stressed that community languages are there to be accessed not just by each of the migrant communities. Spanish or Chinese is not just for those of Spanish or Chinese descent but for all Australians, both for Anglo-Australians and the other more recent migrant communities.

How to give effect to these aspirations is a daunting task, particularly in a society that has complacently accepted the simplistic proposition that ultimately one needs only command of English to get on in the world. Needless to say, mainstream schools (government, religious and independent schools), but also community languages schools (or ethnic schools), as well as colleges and universities (which teach students and train future teachers) have an important part to play – but their respective contributions must be integrated into a more coherent whole than we have so far achieved.

All teaching institutions must provide both students and parents with greater incentives for the learning of languages. A more effective system of rewards must be introduced for the learning of languages at each level of education – primary, secondary and tertiary. Some of these rewards can be made available by the educational institution itself. Students that have satisfactorily completed language proficiency at any level must be given certain entitlements once they proceed to a higher level. This is especially important in the transition from secondary to tertiary education. Universities, in particular, must be strongly encouraged (by a mixed strategy of rewards and

penalties) to facilitate the admission of students who have satisfactorily completed language study at Year 12 level. Similarly, the business and government sectors must reward applicants to jobs, who have completed three years of language study at university level.

The issue is not just language policy, but education and employment policy. We need to cultivate a mindset that acknowledges the importance of a multilingual Australia, and nurtures and rewards linguistic proficiency.

Key features of this mindset are worth noting:

- Communities retain a vibrant connection with their ancestral languages and cultures;
- Australians of all backgrounds are actively encouraged through all our institutions (educational, media, business, professional, governmental) to develop multilingual skills and the intercultural sensitivities that go with them;
- Educational institutions (pre-school, primary, secondary, tertiary and continuing) and educators are materially and intellectually equipped to foster the intermingling of languages (and cultures);
- Measures are introduced to raise the status of the study and teaching of language. The acquisition of multilingual skills is seen as an invaluable by students, teachers, parents, governments and society at large;
- Federal and State governments are prepared to invest heavily on language development at every level of education;
- Language policy outgrows the shallow polarisation between:
 - Community and international languages
 - Asian and European languages
 - The so-called 'economic' and 'cultural' benefits of language learning.

According to some estimates, 36% of primary teachers and 70% of secondary teachers of languages are not adequately qualified. An effective language strategy is one which aims to produce teachers of the highest quality – well trained, knowledgeable, culturally sensitive, highly respected and well remunerated language teachers.

This requires a whole-of-government strategy that mobilises to the full Australia's rich cultural resources at home and abroad. Importantly, it would be a strategy which identifies all the key stakeholders and establishes firm and enduring connections between them.

The obvious stakeholders are teachers, students, and administrators, and the various organisations which represent their interests. Less obvious but no less important are:

- The university sector (which is responsible for the training and professional development of teachers, for admission of students with language skills and interest in language study, and for public advocacy of the benefits of linguistic diversity. Governments at all levels, and especially the Federal Government should use all levers at their disposal to coax universities to fulfill these responsibilities);
- The business, professional and government sectors (through their respective recruitment and human resource policies);
- The media (through their use own use of languages other than English and their advocacy of linguistic diversity);
- Ethnic and religious organisations (that have a strong commitment to linguistic diversity and the necessary outreach to give voice to that commitment);

- Diplomatic missions (that represent countries whose languages we wish to learn).

What is needed is a national strategy supported by an appropriate institutional framework, facilitated by the Federal government (in consultation with State governments), and capable of enlisting the active and sustained engagement of all these stakeholders.

Multiculturalism in Australia is at best a work in progress. Its potential is immense but its promise will not be fulfilled unless we adopt a whole of society approach, in which government at all levels remains sensitive to risks and open to new opportunities.

Professor Emeritus Joseph A. Camilleri OAM

Short Resumé

Academic Qualifications: BA (Melb), MA (Monash), PhD (Lond).

Joseph A Camilleri is Emeritus Professor at La Trobe University (Melbourne), a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Social Sciences, Executive Director of Alexandria Agenda, and Convener of Conversation at the Crossroads

He has taught some thirty-five subjects at undergraduate or postgraduate level; established the highly sought after Bachelor of International Relations Degree, and a few years later the Master of International Policy Studies (now Master of International Relations). He has supervised some forty PhD candidates and mentored more than 30 international relations scholars who now hold senior academic positions at leading universities and research centres around the world.

In 2005 he founded the La Trobe Centre for Dialogue. Under his leadership, the Centre quickly established a national and international reputation for research, training, policy development, and community engagement. The Centre focused on the management of political, cultural and religious diversity within and between countries, especially in the context of tension and conflict.

Joseph Camilleri has authored or edited over 30 books and written some 120 book chapters and journal articles. His research has centred on six key areas: the contemporary role of culture and religion, the Middle East, international politics of the Asia-Pacific region, regional and global governance, and the theory and practice of dialogue, reconciliation and conflict resolution.

Over the past twenty years Camilleri has convened some 20 major international dialogues and conferences, and appeared before several parliamentary and government inquiries, including the parliamentary inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia in 2013.

He has provided regular advice and intellectual support (through guest lectures, forums, workshops, briefing papers and board membership) to a range of governmental and community organisations, including the Victorian Government, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations in the Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, local government bodies, , the Toda Institute for Peace and Global Policy Research, as well as public affairs and educational media programs. He is a frequent media commentator, and a member of several national and international advisory boards.

He has given lectures and keynote addresses around Australia and internationally, including in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Sweden, Norway, France, Italy, China, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia and India.

Professor Camilleri has led a number of cultural diversity related assignments for the Carlton Football Club, the Islamic Council of Victoria, the Shia community in Victoria, the Darebin City Council, Deakin University, La Trobe College Australia and La Trobe University.

Languages

Fluent in English and French, with a good working knowledge of Italian and some knowledge of Spanish, Greek, Russian and Arabic