

Submission to

**Select Committee on Strengthening Multiculturalism**

By

**Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland**

## [Contents 2](#_Toc482369999)

[Introduction 3](#_Toc482370000)

[Strengthening Multiculturalism Inquiry 3](#_Toc482370001)

[a. the views and experiences of people from culturally and linguistically diverse, and new and emerging communities; 4](#_Toc482370002)

[b. the adequacy and accessibility of settlement and social inclusion services and resources available to individuals and communities; 5](#_Toc482370003)

[c. the adequacy of existing data collection and social research on racially motivated crimes; 5](#_Toc482370004)

[d. the impact of discrimination, vilification and other forms of exclusion and bigotry on the basis of ‘race’, colour, national or ethnic origin, culture or religious belief; 5](#_Toc482370005)

[Individual health and wellbeing 5](#_Toc482370006)

[Community cohesion 6](#_Toc482370007)

[Economic impacts 7](#_Toc482370008)

[e. the impact of political leadership and media representation on the prevalence of vilification and other forms of exclusion and bigotry on the basis of ‘race’, colour, national or ethnic origin, culture or religious belief; 8](#_Toc482370009)

[f. how to improve the expected standards of public discourse about matters of ‘race’, colour, national or ethnic origin, culture or religious belief; 9](#_Toc482370010)

[Community Leaders Speaking Up 9](#_Toc482370011)

[Community Action 9](#_Toc482370012)

[Strengths Based Community Work 9](#_Toc482370013)

[g. how to better recognise and value the contribution that diverse communities bring to Australian social and community life; 11](#_Toc482370014)

[h. the potential benefits and disadvantages of enshrining principles of multiculturalism in legislation; 11](#_Toc482370015)

[i. the potential benefits and disadvantages of establishing a legislative basis for the Multicultural Advisory Council, or for an ongoing Multicultural Commission; and 12](#_Toc482370016)

[j. any related matters. 12](#_Toc482370017)

## Introduction

1. The Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland (Commission) is an independent statutory authority established under the Queensland Anti-Discrimination Act 1991.
2. The functions of the Commission include promoting an understanding, acceptance and public discussion of human rights in Queensland, and dealing with complaints alleging contraventions of the Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 and of whistle-blower reprisal. Complaints that are not resolved through conciliation can be referred to the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal for hearing and determination.
3. In promoting the understanding and acceptance of human rights in Queensland, the Commission works towards achieving a fair and inclusive Queensland by community engagement, to create opportunities in local communities for relationship building and collaborative efforts to advance human rights issues.
4. The Commission aims to adopt a strengths based approach in all areas of work. This approach is based on the identification and development of strengths of an individual, organisation, community and system.  This approach begins by focusing on what is working, and where there is strength, success and passion.  The strengths based approach is an alternative to common problem solving approaches which tend to identify what is 'wrong' with a person, group or situation and apply externally-driven interventions to address the problem.  The Commission aims to actively identify, direct and support the capabilities of individuals and groups to achieve positive outcomes and create spaces where human rights can flourish.

## Strengthening Multiculturalism Inquiry

On 29 November 2016, the Senate resolved that the Select Committee on Strengthening Multiculturalism be established on 27 March 2017. The committee is to inquire into and report on ways of protecting and strengthening Australia’s multiculturalism and social inclusion. The Commission provides the Committee with the following information in relation to the terms of its inquiry.

Multiculturalism can be strengthened by:

* Providing opportunities for people of different cultures to connect in a **meaningful** way;
* Creating **safe spaces** for dialogue to occur so that people can share, learn and ask questions to enhance understanding and connection;
* Providing opportunities and support for individuals, groups and communities to mobilise in relation to addressing local issues that present barriers to multiculturalism, inclusion and social cohesion - community led action
* Engaging with membership of RSL, Surf Life Saving, Rotary, Lions, and other sporting and social clubs as entry pathways for new migrants to integrate into established communities

All of these strategies involve different people doing simple things together, building relationships and strengthening community connections. The community engagement work of the ADCQ has highlighted the effectiveness of these strategies, as demonstrated through the examples provided in this submission.

# the views and experiences of people from culturally and linguistically diverse, and new and emerging communities;

As part of its community engagement function the Commission regularly meets with Islamic and other communities together with officers of the police service. Members of the Islamic community in particular continually report incidences of racial and religious abuse when they are trying to go about their daily lives. Some more recent examples are:

* a woman’s headscarf was grabbed and an attempt made to set it on fire;
* a woman sitting in a car was subjected to racial abuse, and then the person pulled down his pants and turned his naked buttocks to her;
* female store owner in Cairns was verbally abused and physically attacked, because she is Muslim. She remains frightened to be in her shop, and is considering increasing security;
* A guest speaker at the Mosque open day in the Rockhampton, who is an Imam from Brisbane, said his wife can no longer go shopping on her own because last time someone spat at her and threw coffee on her;
* It has also been reported to the Commission that a Muslim woman who was verbally abused and threatened on a bus, is now so frightened and concerned that she is unable to travel of buses;
* a prayer room in the Brisbane suburb of Rocklea was painted with racist, graffiti and a mosque in Cairns was vandalised with anti-Muslim slogans;
* windows of a Muslim Gold Coast community centre were smashed and plastic pigs with messages written on them (‘F… off’) were left inside;
* a Townsville home was broken into and vandalised with racist graffiti;
* pigs heads have been left at mosques;
* people are subjected to hate speech and vilifying messages through social media such as Facebook.

# the adequacy and accessibility of settlement and social inclusion services and resources available to individuals and communities;

No comment

# the adequacy of existing data collection and social research on racially motivated crimes;

No comment

# the impact of discrimination, vilification and other forms of exclusion and bigotry on the basis of ‘race’, colour, national or ethnic origin, culture or religious belief;

### Individual health and wellbeing

Racism, including vilification, can have a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of an individual. Contemporary research has found that health among human populations is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon, and for Indigenous peoples, unlike white Australians, racism is a fundamental driver of ill-health. There is now a strong argument and evidence that experiencing racist treatment should be recognised as a social determinant of health.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Reactions to racism (including racism in the form of racial vilification) may produce ill-health effects, including:

* stress and negative emotion reactions that contribute to mental ill health, as well as adversely affecting the immune, endocrine and cardiovascular systems; and
* harmful coping behaviours such as smoking, alcohol and other drug use.[[2]](#footnote-2)

For children and youth from all racial and ethnic groups, contemporary research shows an association between racial discrimination and negative outcomes concerning self-esteem, self-worth and psychological adjustment. There is also a strong association between racial discrimination with poor mental health outcomes (e.g. depression, anxiety) and problem behaviour in children and youth.[[3]](#footnote-3)

In the light of this evidence, as part of prevention and wellbeing strategies, it is important that legislation that prohibits racial discrimination and public conduct amounting to racial vilification is maintained.

### Community cohesion

Australia has one of the highest proportions of overseas born persons in the western world (approximately 23%) and one of the highest rates of ethnic and language diversity. In Queensland over 20% of the population is overseas-born. Queensland also has the second highest proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia. In Queensland, over 3.6% of Queenslanders are Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. [[4]](#footnote-4)

With such diversity, it is important to build community cohesion. Cohesion is principally the process that must happen in all communities to ensure different groups of people get on well together.

Racist violence, harassment and vilification erodes community cohesion, limits the cultural expression and quality of life of members of our diverse community, and can create an environment of fear and intimidation. It can affect such fundamental choices as where people live or work, whether they socialise outside the home and how they engage in their religious observances.

The 1991 National Inquiry into Racist Violence reported that:

Racist violence and harassment reduces self-esteem, promotes insecurity and leads to victims being ashamed of their identity. Consultative group participants in the Inquiry:

... reported feeling like 'losers', unwelcome and different in a strange land. They also felt a very high level of frustration and helplessness!

The harm done to children is particularly disturbing in this respect, as discriminatory attitudes and actions can make them feel they have no rights to fair treatment and are second class citizens.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Recent research further establishes that:

Institutional and individual racism is a key barrier to immigrant integration. Racism persists in Australian society, with Indigenous Australian and immigrant minorities, particularly those of Muslim faith and/or Middle Eastern appearance, the main victims of racist attitudes and practices (Dunn, Klocker and Salabay 2007; Dunn et al 2009; Dunn and Nelson 2011). A 2012 national survey found that while 12 per cent of respondents reported experiences of discrimination, 31 per cent of respondents of Islamic faith, 21 per cent of respondents born in Africa and the Middle East and 20 per cent of respondents born in Asia reported experiences of discrimination (Markus 2012: 2).[[6]](#footnote-6)

Community cohesion should be a primary consideration in the formulation of policy and legislative frameworks. Dismantling or substantially watering down existing legislation that prohibits public incitement of racial hostility risks eroding the relatively high levels of community cohesion and immigrant integration already achieved in Australia.

### Economic impacts

There is limited high quality data available in Australia about the prevalence of racism/discrimination and its impact on health outcomes for the general population, in order to model the economic costs of racism[[7]](#footnote-7).

On a macro level, it is generally accepted that Australia’s existing and future economic prosperity is intrinsically linked to the economic and strategic transformation of our region in the world - the Asia-Pacific region. Evolving partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region contribute to Australia’s prosperity and Australia has nurtured partnerships and relationships by promoting a commitment to multiculturalism and social harmony.

On purely economic terms, Australia cannot afford to be perceived by its Asia-Pacific neighbours as being a racist country, and needs to pay close attention to its international image. Over the years there have been numerous challenges to the view that Australia is a country that values its diverse and multicultural society and is committed to the Asia-Pacific region.[[8]](#footnote-8)

One of the economic strategies Australia actively pursues in the Asia-Pacific region is to attract international students. In 2012-13, overseas students who came to Australia to live and study contributed $14.461 billion to the economy. Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria were the main beneficiaries of this lucrative market. To attract international students, Australia presents a positive picture of Australian society. Australia ranks third highest in the world for its share of international students, and regulates student welfare [[9]](#footnote-9) through a code for the safety and well-being of international students.

Dismantling or substantially watering down existing legislation that prohibits public incitement of racial hostility has risks for Australia’s international reputation. There is the potential to invoke negative overseas press coverage, decreasing numbers of enquiries from skilled Asian and other people wishing to migrate and/or invest in Australia, with a subsequent loss of earnings to Australia both in terms of tourism and business. Building community cohesion is important for Australia’s international reputation.

# the impact of political leadership and media representation on the prevalence of vilification and other forms of exclusion and bigotry on the basis of ‘race’, colour, national or ethnic origin, culture or religious belief;

Political leaders and the media play a role in shaping perceptions, often perpetuating outdated views and myths about certain cultures, religions or multiculturalism in general. During every community conversation facilitated by the ADCQ, the media is raised as a barrier to social cohesion. It is commonly believed amongst stakeholders that mainstream media are disinterested in positive stories of social cohesion, therefore it is necessary for such stories to be shared via social media platforms which are driven by community members or groups. There is an opportunity for mainstream media to play a more positive and proactive role, by presenting stories which highlight the benefits of multiculturalism and cohesive communities and offering more well-rounded perspectives on topical issues.

# how to improve the expected standards of public discourse about matters of ‘race’, colour, national or ethnic origin, culture or religious belief;

### Community Leaders Speaking Up

Messages from community leaders can serve to address misinformation and myths, assert acceptable standards of behaviour and show support for vulnerable groups and victims of discrimination and vilification. In 2014 the Queensland Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, Kevin Cocks released a ‘message of community support’ video in response to ongoing reports of religious and racial vilification. The message was well received by the affected community groups, and the broader community, receiving over 1500 views. The video remains available on the ADCQ website and YouTube channel (<http://www.adcq.qld.gov.au/resources/videos/message-of-community-support>)

### Community Action

Calls to action, or information that supports the community to act can also be beneficial in improving standards of public discourse and behaviour. Also in 2014, the Commission released a video and accompanying factsheet on bystander action. This was in response to several acts of vilification on public transport. The resources provide simple, useful tips on action that can be taken if public acts of harassment, vilification or racist abuse are witnessed. The bystander video was well received, with almost 3000 views. The video is still available on the ADCQ website and YouTube channel (<http://www.adcq.qld.gov.au/resources/videos/bystander-action>) and the factsheet is available on the website (http://www.adcq.qld.gov.au/resources/brochures-and-guides/fact-sheets/bystander-action).

### Strengths Based Community Work

Creating safe spaces for diverse community members to engage in meaningful conversation about the issues that matter to them is also an effective strategy. Examples follow:

1. **Chai Community**

In 2014 the ADCQ was asked for assistance by a group of Muslim women on the Southern Gold Coast who were concerned about community tension around a proposed mosque in the area. They were seeking to connect with other women in the community to answer questions, allay their fears and generally build relationships and a stronger, safer community. The ADCQ used participatory leadership methodologies to bring together a diverse group of Gold Coast women in conversation about building an inclusive community. A series of facilitated conversations ensued and over time the group has grown to a membership of over 100 women representing various faith groups including Muslim, Jehovah’s Witness, Mormon, Buddhist, Christian, Catholic and Jewish. They have called themselves the ‘Chai Community’ and they continue to gather both formally for facilitated conversations and informally for social gatherings. The group has also started attending community events on the Gold Coast and offering ‘chai and chat’ – free chai tea with an offer of conversation on any topic. The women believe that one of the barriers to inclusion is a lack of understanding and a fear or reluctance to ask challenging questions. So they make themselves available to answer questions. A video about the Chai Community is available to view via the ADCQ website (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=28FgSRSN2y0>)

1. **Lockyer Valley Engagement**

In our community engagement work we aim to empower communities to work together towards a fair and inclusive society, by helping them recognise and build on their existing strengths and capacity for collective action.

In 2013, the ADCQ decided to apply this approach in a long-term engagement strategy in the Lockyer Valley, following an invitation from the Lockyer Valley Regional Council Multicultural Project worker and Humanitarian Settlement worker to work in partnership to address issues of discrimination occurring locally.

Three years of intensive work with the Lockyer Valley community has enabled the ADCQ to build strong relationships with the community and key stakeholders, to connect the community with those key stakeholders, and to help them work together to tackle some daunting human rights concerns. In the process the engagement strategy has produced some significant positive outcomes, some of which could not have been foreseen at the start of the project.

A summary report of the Lockyer Valley community engagement project is available on the ADCQ website.

1. **Participatory Leadership Work**

The ADCQ’s community engagement through participatory leadership offers a set of tools and processes for engaging stakeholders in conversations that matter, both with the Commission and within their own communities. It has proven to be a successful framework for mobilising communities to take action to address community issues. Rather than taking ownership of community issues and creating an expectation that the ADCQ or the broader public service will take responsibility for addressing local issues, participatory leadership methodologies allow for leveraging of community energy to find local solutions to local issues. It identifies strengths in an organisation or community and directs those strengths towards a community driven solution. The ADCQ’s role is to support communities to connect with each other and/or to services that can assist them to resolve their issues. The outcomes can often be more successful when reached through a community led initiative than government imposed strategies as the community takes ownership and is responsible for achieving the outcome.

The ADCQ’s participatory leadership framework also includes the skill development and support of community and government representatives to utilise strengths based methodologies as a means of engaging and achieving meaningful community outcomes.

# how to better recognise and value the contribution that diverse communities bring to Australian social and community life;

The ADCQ’S approach in empowering communities to work together towards a fair and inclusive society, by helping them recognise and build on their existing strengths and capacity for collective action has resulted positive outcomes for those communities. It has resulted in an enhanced appreciation by many individuals and stakeholders in those communities of the value and contribution that diverse communities bring to Australian social and community life.

The examples of the Chai Community and the ADCQ’S Lockyer Valley engagement outlined in paragraph f. above are illustrative of this approach.

# the potential benefits and disadvantages of enshrining principles of multiculturalism in legislation;

The ADCQ believes there are benefits in enshrining the principles of multiculturalism in legislation. It provides a platform for discussion with stakeholders in government when developing policy and programs, and in working in the community sector.

The Queensland *Multicultural Recognition Act 2016* commenced on 1 July 2016.

The Act:

* promotes Queensland as a united, harmonious and inclusive community and will foster opportunities for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to participate in all aspects of life in our prosperous state
* acknowledges that a diverse, dynamic and cohesive society will deliver important benefits for all Queenslanders, including the community, government and business sectors
* recognises our diverse cultural heritage and aims to ensure that government services are responsive to the needs of our multicultural communities.

The Act:

* establishes the Multicultural Queensland Charter
* establishes the Multicultural Queensland Advisory Council
* provides for the Queensland Government multicultural policy and action plan
* establishes reporting obligations for government entities.

The Act complements existing government legislation, such as the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* and the Queensland Government’s Language Services Policy. It follows consultation with stakeholders to ensure contemporary community views on promoting community harmony and inclusiveness are reflected in the legislation.

# the potential benefits and disadvantages of establishing a legislative basis for the Multicultural Advisory Council, or for an ongoing Multicultural Commission; and

No comment

# any related matters.

The ADCQ thanks the Committee for the opportunity to make this submission.

1. A Larson et al, ‘It's Enough to Make You Sick: The impact of racism on the health of Aboriginal Australians’, (2007) 31 (4) *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 322–9. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Y Paradies, R Harris, and I Anderson, *The Impact of Racism on Indigenous Health in Australia and Aotearoa: Towards a Research Agenda - Discussion Paper No. 4* (Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health 2008) 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. N Priest et al, ‘A systematic review of studies examining the relationship between reported racism and health and wellbeing for children and young people’ (2013) 95 *Social Science and Medicine* 115-127. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, as at 30 June 2006, the preliminary Estimated Indigenous Resident Population (ERP) in Queensland was 146,429 (3.6% of all people in Queensland). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Racist violence: Report of the National Inquiry into Racist Violence in Australia* (Australian Government Publishing Service, 1991)261. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. JH Collins, 'Multiculturalism and Immigrant Integration in Australia', (2013) 45 (3) *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 133-149. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. N Priest and Y Paradies*, Economic Costs of Racism in Australia: Scoping Project Report* (University of Melbourne) Social Justice Initiative, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, above n 1, 263; Andrew Jakubowicz, *Is Australia a racist society?: reflections on globalisation, multiculturalism and Pauline Hanson* (Australia-Indonesia Institute, 1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Gaby Ramia; Simon Marginson, and Erlenawati Sawir, ‘The regulation of international student welfare in Australia’ (2013) 71. *Journal of Australian Political Economy* 106-129. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)