



## **Submission to Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee**

### ***The Nationhood, National Identity and Democracy***

#### **Introduction**

The Chinese Australian Services Society Limited (commonly known as “CASS” in the community) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry into nationhood, national identity and democracy, in particular, focusing on social cohesion and cultural identity.

As a long standing community organisation, CASS has been dedicated to assisting disadvantaged people of local communities and advocating on their behalf. Our submission is a reflection of the views and concerns that we received from our service users and people in our community, as well as observation and conclusions we made while delivering services to our clients, who are significantly affected by the measures of Australia’s multiculturalism.

#### **About Our Organisation**

CASS was founded in 1981. Its main service objective is to provide a wide range of welfare services to the multicultural community, and assist migrants to settle and integrate into the Australian society. The comprehensive range of community services and activities provided by CASS cater the needs of cradle to seniors, including residential aged care, child care, services in home ageing, disability, vocational training, settlement and health, volunteering, etc. Most of the services provided by CASS cover the whole of Metropolitan Sydney, with some covering areas down to Wollongong, serving Chinese, Koreans, Indonesians, Vietnamese, people from other CALD communities, as well as the general public. More than 2,800 families access our services and activities weekly.

During the 38 years of serving the community, CASS has witnessed many clients benefiting from Australia’s insightful multicultural policy. However, there are many challenges to the ideals of multiculturalism within contemporary issues involving migration, social cohesion, cultural identity, social inclusion, etc. In response to the issues raised by the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee, we would like to present the following:

## **1) What are the connections between national identity, cultural identity, and social cohesion?**

Multiculturalism is a key feature of Australia as a nation of modern liberal democracy. It is the foundation for establishing connections between national identity, cultural identity and social cohesion. It entails supporting and maintaining actively diversity, equal emphasis on rights and responsibilities and the focus on democratic values of participation, inclusion, fairness and justice. All Australians have the same basic rights to practise and maintain their cultural heritage, traditions and language under the law and are free from discrimination regardless of their cultural background and country of origin. The Asian communities, especially the Chinese community, have lived in Australia since the 19th Century. The early Asian settlers in regional Australia suffered racial abuses, verbal and physical, and had to face the introduction of White Australia policy until the election of the Whitlam government in early 1970s.

In the last two decades, there has been the influx of a significant number of Chinese migrants from the Mainland China. New forms of discrimination against the entire Chinese community seems to have emerged and become prevalent under the foreign influence debate. The loyalty and commitment of Chinese Australians to Australia are repeatedly questioned as the mainstream media and a section of the Australian community singling out the Chinese community as being under the influence of China or even the Chinese Communist Party and not upholding the interests of Australia. The spreading of such prejudicial views create and lead to mistrust and intolerance in the Australian society against the entire Chinese community.

A recent survey of more than 2000 people on Asian-Australian experiences of discrimination was conducted by Australian National University in August 2019. Astonishing results published in The Sydney Morning Herald that 82 per cent of Asian-Australian respondents indicated they had experience discrimination, mostly at shops and restaurants, followed by in the workplace or educational institutions. Ms. Tuanh Nguyen, a director at consulting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers, said a number of studies suggested Asian-Australians only accounted for 3-5 per cent of senior leadership positions in business while they represent 12 per cent of the population. Ms. Nguyen ascribed such barriers to systemic racism and prejudice towards Asian-Australians from the society.

Australia is one of the nations among the most culturally diverse in the world. When the principles of national and cultural identities are being marginalised, social cohesion will be fragmented. Hence, legislative actions are needed to maintain harmony and protect those affected citizens.

**2) Are you concerned that cultural anxieties in Australia and elsewhere are increasing? If so, what should be done about this?**

Establishing links between migrants and the wider community is one of the keys to successful settlement outcome and to reduce level of cultural anxieties for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) migrants. For many years, ethno-specific community organisations have been playing this role to foster those links. Those organisations are also the voice and the advocates on behalf of the respective community's needs as well as the encouragers of communities to showcase their culture, participate and connect with what is happening in the wider community.

For emerging migrant communities, through English learning language programs and the use of new technology approaches, those issues arising from low English proficiency among migrants of non-English speaking background, and enhance awareness of national identity can be addressed and improved. Apart from translating and interpreting services, bilingual social workers and case managers are also highly important for new migrants to minimise cultural anxieties as they are capable of delivering the services of better quality and efficiency.

The Government should facilitate the provision of more settlement and social inclusion services through funding appropriate community services programs to assist emerging migrants of CALD background to reduce cultural anxieties. In addition, there should be more resources allocated to expand culturally and linguistically appropriate services, e.g., interpretation services. The existing settlement services need to be expanded to cover new locations of residence to meet the demands.

**3) What constitutes a nation in the twenty first century?**

According to Cambridge Dictionary, a nation is defined as a large group of people of the same race who share the same language, traditions, and history. However, this definition does not seem to be applicable to nations in the twenty-first century, in particular, to those countries like Australia with significant migration program in which half of the Australian population are born overseas or with at least one parent born overseas. The Australian multicultural society is made up of migrants born almost from every country in the world.

There can be many barriers for immigrants of CALD background of the emerging communities when trying to seek and access settlement supports. To constitute a harmonious and multicultural nation in the twenty first century, the following measures should be implemented:

- Enhance religious and racial tolerance and harmony in schools to ensure bullying at all school levels is minimised;
- As English is the official and common language in Australia and is the key for successful integration, more funding should be made available to ensure that it is not a major issue for migrants of emerging communities of CALD background to blend into the Australian society;
- Migrant communities should be encouraged to take initiatives to address their language barrier issues to the best of their abilities, with more available programs and resources in their community language;
- At school level, there should be emphasis on teaching Australian values and our history as a harmonious society through various means; and
- The benefits of a multicultural society to be highlighted:
  - Because Australia is a multicultural country, it is able to attract skilled and talented migrants from all over the world to this Country;
  - With a CALD environment, opportunities, capability and ability exist to develop new ideas, creativity and technology; and
  - Most Australians support Multiculturalism.

## **Conclusion**

We welcome the opportunity to provide feedback to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee on social cohesion. In this submission, we have presented the feedback that we received from people in our community, including volunteers, users of our services, participants in activities organised by us, and staff members. We would appreciate if the Committee takes into account the viewpoints and concerns raised in this submission. We are happy to further discuss the matter to elaborate these viewpoints and concerns and we consent to our submission to be made public.

Anthony Pang  
Deputy Chairperson/Secretary  
CASS Group

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