



# Australian Multicultural Council

Ms Meredith Baker  
Research Manager  
Productivity Commission  
L2, 15 Moore Street  
Canberra City  
ACT 2600

Dear Ms Baker

**Australian Multicultural Council submission  
Productivity Commission Joint Study  
Closer Economic Relations initiatives**

As an independent, non-partisan advisory council to the Australian Government, the Australian Multicultural Council (AMC) appreciates this opportunity to bring to the Productivity Commission's attention the growing social implications of changes to the accessibility of entitlements by New Zealand citizens living in Australia coupled with the limited pathways to Australian citizenship available to this group.

Information provided in *Supplementary Report D: Cross border movement of people*, indicates that two key decisions made by the Australian Government in 2001 and 2007, while economically justifiable, have also led to financial hardship for many New Zealand citizens living in Australia while simultaneously creating a permanent second class of people without a clear pathway to either permanent residency or Australian citizenship.

This is of particular concern to the AMC as the success of Australian multiculturalism has been based on the overarching value of citizenship. In launching Australia's multicultural policy, the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship the Hon Chris Bowen MP said that citizenship has been an important part of Australian multiculturalism.

Also noted in the supplementary report (page 25), based on information provided by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, are the most commonly raised concerns by New Zealand citizens living in Australia: social inclusion, access to citizenship, access to HECS-HELP and claims of racial discrimination and human rights breaches. It is also acknowledged that Australian citizens living in New Zealand as permanent residents are provided access to all services and benefits after uniform waiting periods have passed.

Many of these issues were also raised in the context of the Access and Equity Inquiry which reported to Government in June 2012. A number of submissions raised concerns relating to non-protected New Zealand Special Category Visa (SCV) holders arguing that the exclusion from government services for this cohort is discriminatory and unfair. Given the Council's representation on the Inquiry panel, we are pleased to note that the Productivity Commission has requested contact details for some of the organisations and individuals who raised these concerns through the Inquiry process with a view to further canvassing the issues.

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We are also pleased that the government is considering the issue of alternative pathways to Australian permanent residency and/or citizenship, and encourage consideration of Australia's continuing social cohesion in their deliberations.

The Closer Economic Relations discussion and supplementary papers consider many facets of a more integrated trans-Tasman labour market. However, the emergence in Australia of an economically disadvantaged group, which also identifies as socially marginalised, appears not to have been considered or addressed. The fact that a number of these individuals are of Maori, Samoan, Tahitian or other Pacific Islander heritage can contribute to a sense of exclusion based on cultural identity.

As partners of Australia's National Anti-Racism Strategy, the AMC considers such experiences to be detrimental to Australia's long term social cohesion and localised community harmony. Australia's commitment to positive relations with our trans-Tasman neighbours adds another dimension to this issue.

In conclusion, we strongly recommend that the Productivity Commission undertake research on the topic of New Zealand citizens living in Australia, with particular consideration of their greater inclusion in both the Australian economy and society. We believe that this research would contribute to the Commission's research program under the theme 'Labour markets – including distributional and other social dimensions'.

The AMC looks forward to continuing discussions with the Productivity Commission on this matter.

Yours sincerely

Judge Rauf Soulio  
Chair  
Australian Multicultural Council  
25 October 2012

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