

CONSULTATION REPORT

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION: NATIONAL ANTI-RACISM FRAMEWORK

BACKGROUND

On Wednesday 19 May 2021, the Multicultural Queensland Advisory Council (the Council) assisted the Australian Human Rights Commission (the Commission) to undertake consultation on the development of a National Anti-Racism Framework (the Framework) in Cairns. Participants included community groups, organisations and service providers representing culturally diverse cohorts in the Cairns region.

Cairns prides itself on being one of Australia's most vibrant multicultural cities, which is consistent with the 2016 census data indicating that over 20% of the population were born outside Australia. This includes around 12% of residents being born in 'non-main English-Speaking Countries' with the most common being: Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Japan, India and Germany. The most common languages other than English spoken at home include Japanese, Mandarin, Italian, German and Korean.

With this in mind, Multicultural Affairs (MA) and the Commission saw Cairns as an excellent opportunity to seek feedback from regionally based culturally diverse cohorts, and ensure their perspectives were incorporated into the development of the Framework.

Racism is a problem in Australia, with a range of research supporting this notion. For example, the Scanlon Foundation's *Mapping Social Cohesion – The Scanlon Foundation Surveys 2020* report, found 18% of survey respondents in 2020 had experienced discrimination based on skin colour, ethnicity or religion – which is close to the level in 2018 (19%) and 2019 (16%). The report also highlights “evidence of relatively high level of negative opinion towards Asian Australians – and evidence of high levels of concern indicated by Asian Australian respondents”.

The Scanlon Foundation found that the majority of survey respondents (55%) indicated they had seen racist content online in the last 3 months – primarily on Facebook (46%). Of those who had seen racism online, the majority (54%) indicated that they took no action in response. Interestingly, only respondents born in Asia indicated that they reported racist comment to police or government, and this was only a very small minority (3%).

The Commission has developed a proposal, or 'concept paper', for a Framework which describes key components of what a national strategy to address racism must include and why it is needed. The concept paper also outlines the proposed guiding principles, national outcome areas as well as key actions and strategies to achieve the outcome areas.

It is intended that a Framework:

- will serve as a long-term, central reference point for actions on anti-racism in Australia

- outline a coordinated, shared vision to tackle racism
- would contemplate action from across different parts of government as well as actively fostering community / business partnerships and building capacity of communities to respond to racism.

Focal points of the Framework include:

- recognising racism is a problem in Australia
- acknowledging Australia's First Nations history and promoting the human rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians
- ensuring a national data collection system which can operate to identify the extent and severity of racism in Australia and provide a more detailed, nuanced picture of the diverse make-up of the Australian population
- ensuring broad based community understanding of racism, and how to counter it
- strengthening multiculturalism and social cohesion, and building community-based partnerships
- building capacity in communities vulnerable to racism
- ensuring all Australian governments commit to eradicating racism and racial discrimination
- ensuring legal frameworks are effective in protecting against racial discrimination and have capacity to address systemic and institutional racism.

PURPOSE OF THE CONSULTATION

The purpose of the consultation was to seek feedback on the proposed Framework from Cairns-based organisations, service providers and community groups, specifically those who support or represent people from culturally diverse backgrounds. Feedback was also sought on how the Commission could best engage with culturally diverse communities on the Framework.

STRUCTURE

Nineteen representatives from across Cairns participated in the consultation, which was led by the Commission.

The session opened with an address from the Honourable Leanne Linard MP, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Chair of the Multicultural Queensland Advisory Council, and the Australian Race Discrimination Commissioner, Mr Chin Tan.

The group then heard from Ms Catherine Duff of the Commission, who provided an overview of the Framework proposal and outlined how the session would run.

The room was then split into four small groups, each led by a Council member (facilitators) and supported by Council members and MA staff as scribes to record discussion. Facilitators were provided with consultation questions (see **Attachment 1**) to obtain feedback on:

- support for the proposal

- guiding principles
- national outcomes
- link between outcomes and activities
- connecting with community
- next steps.

Following a short break, the facilitators reported back to the group on key points from their small group discussions.

KEY RESPONSES

The key themes arising from the consultation were:

- Anti-racist agenda priorities should include support for victims (clear and effective reporting processes), education on racism and better data collection.
- The Framework is considered important as it will define racism, outline reporting processes and legal rights, and provide guidance for government, businesses, institutions and individuals.
- Reference to First Nations peoples in the guiding principles is important.
- There needs to be stronger, more active language throughout the guiding principles.
- The proposed national outcomes could be strengthened by including reference to the responsibility of media and what they choose to publish.
- There needs to be more measurable national outcomes i.e. including quotas and positive discrimination targets.
- Current activity towards the proposed outcomes include the Cairns Regional Council's Welcoming Cities work and that community leaders play a key role in facilitating social connection and cohesion.
- Some actions and strategies that have worked include: unconscious bias and cultural awareness programs; festivals which help people to feel proud of their culture and enable intercultural connection; education on racism; finding common interests between cultures to bring people together; and the Federal government pushes something that flows to the state level.
- The lack of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) representation, English proficiency and reliance on community leaders are considered barriers to success.
- Ideas for strategies and activities to help achieve the Framework outcomes included:
 - greater education about racism – including what racism is/isn't (with examples of racist words, actions and behaviours)
 - raising awareness about the impact of racism on victims

- better mechanisms and processes for reporting racism, and for follow up with relevant parties (victim, perpetrator, institution in which it took place)
- organisations, business and government to take responsibility for racism occurring within their institutions
- media need to be held accountable for how they contribute to racism
- recognise and resource community leaders as volunteers, who are often involved in consultations and implementation of activities
- the Commission having stronger local presence including at events and festivals.
- Consultation needs to be localised and tailored and involve locals.
- Consultation should occur with CALD communities directly (not just service providers and ‘stakeholders’) as well as the non-CALD ‘majority culture’.
- There is some concern that the Framework has the potential to be just another ‘fluffy’ document if not taken up by the Federal Government and resourced appropriately.
- The consultation session itself could be improved with less questions and a community led train-the-trainer approach.

THE DETAIL

SUPPORT FOR THE PROPOSAL

Participants were asked about their priorities for an anti-racist agenda in Australia. They identified the following as priorities:

- providing support for victims
 - effective and accessible reporting mechanisms
 - ensuring there are follow up actions, including for organisations who participants felt should have a responsibility for dealing with racism
- raising awareness and educating people in relation to
 - increasing their cultural awareness
 - the fact racism is a problem
 - the value of cultural diversity beyond surface level things
 - starting at an early age including informal exposure and story telling
 - people’s rights enshrined in law regarding racism
 - the impact of racism on victims
- improved data collection, specifically the need for:
 - data from local governments around incidents of racism – and this should be linked to demographic data such as census

- long term data collection.

Participants were also asked whether they thought a Framework was important or not. Overall, they felt a Framework is important. Reasons why participants held this view included that a Framework will:

- help educate people on racism, specifically:
 - what racism is in Australia – i.e. by identifying what words are considered racist, and what types of actions and behaviours are racist
 - impact and consequences of racism
- offer guidance on processes (such as reporting) and legal rights
- provide for a shared Framework on what is allowed
- be a Framework that enables people to find common ground with others and feel like they fit in/belong in Australia
- provide guidance to the business sector and allow for government to be held accountable
- help protect cultural identity and allow people to feel safe to express their culture.

Some felt that a Framework should be part of a broader Diversity & Inclusion Framework, not just a standalone Framework.

Some noted that racism occurs at the local level so a Framework needs to accommodate for nuances in terms of how racism manifests at a local level.

During the consultation session, there were also some concerns raised about the Framework being ‘another document’ that may not have effect without appropriate buy in and resourcing.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

When asked for their thoughts on the Framework’s proposed guiding principles, participants highlighted that the first two points which address the colonial history were crucial as ‘it’s important that anyone who comes to Australia is aware of the history’.

Participants had a lot of suggested changes and additions to the proposed guiding principles, including:

- the need to better reflect the position of First Nations peoples and address the structural discrimination for First Nations peoples in the Framework
- the need to use stronger/focused/direct language

‘It’s important that anyone who comes to Australia is aware of the history’

- include the notion that Australians who are born locally should respect people from all cultures regardless of when or how they entered Australia – and that Australia is a place that accepts any culture
- some specific amendments:
 - Principle #2: use stronger wording than ‘understand’
 - Principle #4: ‘acknowledge’ could be stronger
 - Principle #3: ‘rule of law’ and #5 ‘before the law’ – question reference to law
 - Principle #7: add ‘institutions’ and ‘businesses’.

Participants also suggested that the Framework include examples of situations where the guiding principles could be applied.

Some participants did express whether a Framework would be ‘fluffy’ and ‘another document’; and some said there needs to be commitment instead of guiding principles.

NATIONAL OUTCOMES

Participants were asked about the kinds of outcomes the Framework could seek to achieve, and identified the following potential outcomes:

- media having a sense of responsibility for what they publish
- media publishing positive stories of integration
- people having confidence to be who they are – owning their individuality, not feeling the pressure to conform
- a meritocratic society – a real “fair go”.

Participants were asked whether the proposed national outcomes were relevant and appropriate. There was agreement that the outcomes are relevant, with participants noting:

- there is a need to embed confidence building and advocacy skills in the outcomes (i.e. being proud of who you are)
- the media related outcome is particularly relevant (*note: participants were referring to Outcome 4 ‘The community understands racism and racial discrimination, and how to counter it’*)
- Outcome 7 (‘All Australian Governments commit to prioritising inclusive education initiatives that support racial equality’) was seen as particularly relevant and welcomed.

When asked whether the outcomes reflect the participants’ communities’ priorities, there was some agreement and several felt the Framework will positively impact experiences of racism.

When asked about changes and additions to the outcomes, participants provided the following suggestions:

- make the outcomes more concrete e.g. use quotas and positive discrimination targets

- outcomes should highlight particular industries where racism is more prevalent
- add in an outcome about Australia becoming a leader in this space
- add an outcome related to improving the complaints process as it was noted that:
 - currently ‘if you make a complaint it will come back to bite you’ and ‘there is nothing the (Commission) can do for you’
 - the process is complex and needs to be simplified
 - communities do not have confidence in existing processes.

LINK BETWEEN OUTCOMES AND ACTIONS

Participants were asked whether their current anti-racism and social cohesion work already fits under the proposed national outcomes. Some participants identified the following as aligning with the proposed national outcomes:

- the Cairns Regional Council has a Welcoming Cities program that aims to make Cairns more inclusive and build social cohesion through systemic frameworks
- all participants as community leaders play a role in facilitating social cohesion between Australians e.g. providing a bridge between migrants and local resources.

Participants were also asked about the kinds of actions and strategies which have worked to achieve the proposed national outcomes in projects that had been a part of. They identified the following:

- unconscious bias campaigns
- cultural awareness programs
- Cairns Multicultural Festival
- enabling people to be proud of their culture
- finding common interests among people (e.g. sport, kids, arts)
- making the community aware of racism
- mobilising resources to host festivals which make people feel empowered and also provide a link between migrant communities and the dominant community
- when the Federal government leads an initiative, which then flows to the states.

“If a large number of people can’t speak English, it is difficult to facilitate social cohesion, mobilise and coordinate resources...”

Participants were also questioned about the kinds of barriers and enablers that have come up in previous strategies and activities. Barriers identified by participants included:

- lack of CALD representation
- closed mindedness

- English proficiency – that is, if a large number of people can't speak English, it is difficult to facilitate social cohesion, mobilise and coordinate resources
- heavy reliance on community leaders to act as voice for the entire community
- community leaders lack incentive to provide effective leadership in the community – many do it on a volunteer basis (e.g. must take time off work)
- retribution – people are afraid they will be punished.

Participants said reliable news outlets for migrant communities were an enabler.

In relation to additional future strategies and activities that are needed to achieve the proposed outcomes, participants identified a range of strategies and activities for the Commission's consideration including:

- resourcing the sector to better advocate (given community leaders are volunteers)
- an anonymous hotline
- ambassadors – business leaders, role models, young people, sporting figures
- allies from all sectors especially mainstream
- need for public awareness raising and education about racism including:
 - digital campaign
 - clear targeted messaging
 - no political messages – politicians to stay away
 - supporting people to understand
- creating opportunities to come together to understand 'why' and support resolution
- having community targeted outcomes which allow/support actions that are meaningful and representative of the ways in which communities and groups work
- targeted initiatives/actions for specific communities or cultural groups should include a requirement to either preference or partner with the relevant community/group
- recognition of the cultural capital as well as recognition of prior learning and conversion of tertiary qualifications for migrants and refugees
- need human rights flyers at festivals, Council Community Centres, websites, online
- need an anti-racism day – a community campaign including resources/resourcing.

*“Do people know we are
being discriminated against?”*

Some participants noted some actions may not be achievable.

Participants were asked about resources that were currently available, and gaps in resourcing to support these activities. Participants noted:

- there are limited resources available in Cairns

- there is a big shift to providing services online and funding is needed to support face to face administration of activities if they prove to be more effective than being undertaken online
- the current actions and strategies need to be reviewed to identify gaps and who is undertaking actions/strategies.

CONNECTING COMMUNITY WITH THE COMMISSION

Participants were asked for guidance on the best way to engage with their communities in relation to the Framework. In response, participants provided the following advice:

- get local support services and council to host/provide space for communities to come together
- use local community leaders as influencers who can then share their experiences with the community
- undertake workshops where resources are available in various language so that more community members can fully engage
- build trust with community and service providers
- more community consultations with migrants (i.e. not just community leaders) as well as multiple stakeholders such as police
- have liaison officers representing different communities and acting as a bridge between the Commission and the community
- conduct engagement in less formal settings
- consultation needs to be holistic not piecemeal
- participants need more time to look at the document so it can be considered in-depth.

The Commission also sought advice about gathering community feedback, with participants highlighting the following:

- have a network partnership with community leaders/facilitators to communicate and support conversation
- have a stall at community festivals across the year
- ensure the Commission has a local presence
- need locals to be involved
- need separate consultation for older people/youth
- use multicultural community organisations to undertake consultations
- engage children in schools – and use creative methods (e.g. YouTube)
- have a different version of the concept paper summary for different groups

- utilise social media – look at community pages, see who is active and build a relationship with them
- have competitions that incentivise people to engage and provide feedback as well as build awareness
- engage with religious leaders and community leaders – respectfully approach for advice
- have less questions.

One group highlighted there are community leaders/members who can break down the contents of the Framework to support communities to understand the provisions, activities and processes.

In relation to the consultation sessions, participants collectively recommended the Commission have fewer consultation questions and take a more informal, community led train-the-trainer approach.

There was also consensus that 'non-CALD' cohorts need to be consulted on the Framework.

NEXT STEPS FOR THE COMMISSION

Participants were asked what the Commission could do right now and over the coming months to ensure a diversity of multicultural and First Nations community voices are included in discussions about a National Anti-Racism Framework.

Some participants noted that each culture is different, and for people with limited English abilities it would be hard to understand and contribute. They recommended the Commission consider providing information in different languages and using different channels for distribution – including those which will reach school kids, stay at home parents, disengaged communities.

In relation to how the Commission could 'elevate' their Framework proposal, one group suggested the Commission consider breaking up the Framework into a '3 phase program'. They suggested Phase 1 could have a few objectives and initiatives, and the Commission could see how governments go with that – similar to a reconciliation action plan.

ATTACHMENT 1

Consultation questions

1. Support for proposal

- 1.1 What are the priorities for an anti-racist agenda in Australia?
- 1.2 Why do you think a National Racism Framework is important or not important?

2. Guiding principles

- 2.1 What do you think about the Framework's proposed guiding principles?
- 2.2 Do they reflect the principles you think should be included in a Framework?
- 2.3 Do you have suggestions about changes or additions?

3. National outcomes

- 3.1 What kinds of outcomes can this Framework seek to achieve?
- 3.2 Are the proposed national outcomes relevant and appropriate to you?
- 3.3 Do they reflect your communities' priorities?
- 3.4 Do you have suggestions about changes and additions?

4. Link between outcomes and actions

- 4.1 Which of your current anti-racism and social cohesion work already fits under the proposed national outcomes?
- 4.2 What kinds of actions and strategies have worked to achieve these outcomes in projects that you have been a part of?
- 4.3 What kinds of barriers and enablers have come up in previous strategies and activities?
- 4.4 What (additional) future strategies and activities are needed to achieve the proposed outcomes?
- 4.5 What resources are currently available and what are the gaps in resourcing to support these activities?

5. Connecting your community with the Commission

- 5.1 What guidance can you provide about the best way to engage with your communities about the framework?
- 5.2 What advice can you give the Commission about gathering community feedback?

6. Next steps

- 6.1 What can we do right now and over the coming months to ensure a diversity of multicultural and First Nations community voices are included in discussions about a national anti-racism framework?
- 6.2 What can we do to elevate this proposal?