

Community Relations Commission

For a multicultural NSW



COMMUNITY HARMONY REFERENCE GROUP

REPORT OF EVALUATION SEMINAR

Prepared By
Maria Dimopoulos
MyriaD Consultants

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1. Introduction**
 - 1.1 Background
 - 1.2 CHRG Terms of Reference
 - 1.3 Purpose and Process of Evaluation

- 2. Evaluation**
 - 2.1 Activities Undertaken by CHRG
 - 2.2 Effectiveness of Activities
 - 2.2.1 CRC's Engaging Role in CHRG
 - 2.2.2 Issue Driven Goals
 - 2.2.3 Feedback to Communities
 - 2.2.4 Government Commitment
 - 2.3 Challenges
 - 2.3.1 Media Frustration
 - 2.3.2 Lack of Federal and Local Government Involvement
 - 2.3.3 Impact of State Election
 - 2.3.4 Membership

- 3. Future Issues**
 - 3.1 Where to From Here?
 - 3.1.1 Future Role
 - 3.1.2 CRC's Vision

- 4. Summary of Evaluation**

- 5. Appendix 1**

1. introduction

1.1 Background

In mid-October 2002 Premier Carr directed the Community Relations Commission to set up the Community Harmony Reference Group to ensure a co-ordinated rapid response to any local community relations issues that may arise in the aftermath of the Bali Bombing and in the months leading to the conflict with Iraq.

The Reference Group met for the first time in October 2002 and was convened by the Chairperson of the Community Relations Commission, Mr Stepan Kerkyasharian. It was attended by representatives from the NSW Police, NSW Departments of Education and Community Services and the NSW Anti-Discrimination Board. Sydney's Islamic, Arabic, Jewish, Indonesian, Turkish and Sikh communities are also represented on the Reference Group.*

1.2 CHR Terms of Reference

The terms of reference were

1. To ensure a coordinated, rapid response to local community relations issues arising from the terrorist attack in Bali and the possible Australian involvement in a conflict with Iraq.
2. To provide a high level communication channel between government and those parts of the community likely to be affected.
3. To assist government agency activities to maintain community harmony, prevent harassment and violence and assist victims.
4. To engage and assist the media in its treatment of the issues in an informed and balanced way.
5. To consider actions recommended by communities and government agencies to promote local community harmony.

In implementing the above objectives, the Reference Group established a Steering Committee and three Working Groups to focus on specific areas –

- Education,
- Arabic and Islamic community issues, and
- Public Discourse.

The Reference Group met on a bimonthly basis, with the Steering Committee and working groups meeting fortnightly or on a needs basis.

1.3 Purpose and Process of Evaluation

After almost nine months of activity, the CRC decided to undertake a brief evaluation of the Reference Group in order to assess the extent to which the Group had succeeded in achieving its terms of reference.

*See Appendix A for complete list of Reference Members

Evaluation is a critical component of any program. It can be an invaluable tool to all the participants and stakeholders, providing information about program development and implementation as well as outcomes.

Clearly then, evaluating the progress and outcomes achieved by the Reference Group can provide recommendations and “lessons learned” for any future activities that may be considered.

The complex nature of community initiatives, such as those undertaken by the Reference Group, often makes it difficult to select solid measurement or evaluation tools. Measures of community ‘harmony’ or prevention of community ‘disharmony’ are more difficult to measure than traditional indicators such as numbers of new community support groups established, or numbers of ‘positive’ news articles distributed by the media.

Nevertheless it is important that an evaluation study attempt to assess to some extent, the degree to which the Reference Group was able to implement the terms of reference.

Therefore, the key aims of the evaluation are to:

- Measure the effectiveness and efficiency of the CHRNG
- Measure the progress towards the aims, objectives and goals, both short and long term
- Inform future decision making in relation to the Group’s continuity.

In evaluating the Reference Group’s activities and their outcomes, the CRC adopted a highly participatory approach to ensure that the views and opinions of the Reference Group members were comprehensively canvassed. In particular, an evaluation seminar was held in June 2003 and facilitated by an external evaluator. This type of evaluation essentially involves the community and government stakeholders in a process of reflecting on how the processes, activities and outcomes proceeded. By focusing on an understanding of how the terms of reference were implemented, the evaluation is designed to examine whether the outcomes delivered were the ones intended, and whether they had the necessary and desired impact on both community harmony and government policy.

A total of nineteen CHRNG representatives attended the June seminar. A draft copy of the Evaluation Report was then distributed to all members, providing members with an additional opportunity to add further comment.

To evaluate whether the CHRNG was able to accomplish their core objectives, participants were asked the following questions

- How were they achieved?
- What was effective?
- What was not so effective?
- What could be done differently?

This report documents the key responses provided by participants to the above questions. Overall, it is hoped that the report sufficiently captures the highly collaborative spirit and participatory nature of the CHRNG.

2. evaluation

2.1 Activities undertaken by the CHRG

To ensure a coordinated, rapid response to local community relations issues, the following activities were identified as having been undertaken by the CHRG

- Established and advertised community harmony hotline in relevant community languages.
- Established and advertised an e-mail helpline.
- Met as per operational guidelines and networked
- Built positive relationships and networks
- Established several working parties
- Established a steering committee
- Generated commitment of participants in the process
- Allocated resources; including staffing
- Identified key people/communities/government agencies that would assist in the process
- Established network for information flow
- Maintained communication flow
- Utilised resources from other agencies
- Support for the development of COMPLAN

Some participants commented that despite resource limitations, the range and extent of activities undertaken was varied and considerable.

2.2 Effectiveness of Activities

It is important to note that in reflecting on the effectiveness of activities undertaken, most Reference Group members suggested that the terms of reference were 'significant' and extremely 'broad', and as such should be considered as 'ideals' to be aspired and worked towards, rather than expected outcomes in themselves. This then also necessitated the need to categorise the various activities undertaken as being both short and longer term.

Some participants also highlighted that whilst some activities and outcomes could be readily documented and evidenced, there was also a need to assess the more subtle and less evident impacts of some of the activities undertaken. Some important outcomes, such as the changes in relationships among and between people in the community happen very subtly and incrementally and should also be captured in an evaluation report.

The following themes therefore indicate the effectiveness of the CHRG in coordinating responses to community relations issues and channelling communication.

2.2.1 *CRC's Engaging Role in the CHRG*

The CRC was unanimously applauded by Reference Group members for its coordination role. CRC played a key role in engaging the CHRG members and other stakeholders, thus contributing to achieving some of the CHRG objectives. The effectiveness was due to the fact that the CRC:

- Acted as a single point of contact.
- Allocated resources and engaged the group by convening meetings and maintained communication flow by distributing minutes.
- Undertook a proactive approach to possible community issues.
- Acted neutrally towards all parties.

Participants identified that any future activities modelled on the CHRNG framework would depend on the existence of an organisation like the CRC.

2.2.2 Issue Driven Goals

The issue driven nature of the CHRNG enabled the representatives from diverse agencies to have a strong focus on achieving its objectives.

Participants frequently commented on the ability of the Group to work as a ‘team’ and so commit to shared goals and objectives:

“CHRNG members put aside all differences and met as a unified group”

By focusing on the ‘issues’, group representatives suggested that their capacity to facilitate individual and collective dialogue amongst members of their respective communities was greatly enhanced.

“Tribute to participating community groups to put aside their differences”

Other participants commented that the meetings provided an important forum where group representatives could communicate ideas and concerns, give each other feedback and develop strategies to support each other. As one participant stated:

“Sympathy shared between communities”

2.2.3 Feedback to Communities

Community engagement is essential for identifying key issues, needs, opportunities and enthusiasms. Reference Group members reported that providing feedback to their relevant communities contributed to the easing of some tensions within their respective communities. Some participants were of the view that the CHRNG, through its formal and informal feedback mechanisms was able to stimulate people’s interest to explore related issues and develop locally based solutions.

Some participants highlighted that the degree to which the various community activities undertaken were successful depended largely on the extent of community involvement. In the view of one participant, real ownership and support is established when the community contributes to the process, participates actively in planning, implementing, operating and maintaining community-level projects and establishes a dialogue with state and local government bodies. This in turn helps ensure longer-term sustainability.

2.2.4 Government Commitment

The State Government’s role was identified as establishing the strategic direction and policy framework for the terms of reference, and through the establishment of the CHRNG facilitate implementation of that direction. The NSW government’s clear commitment to the process was very evident and considered by Reference Group members to be effective. The NSW Premier’s positive comments to the media also reinforced the strong commitment of the government in generating and maintaining community harmony.

Participants also frequently commented on the benefit provided to them of participating in a process that promised input into high level policy decision making:

“There was great enthusiasm and expectations from the participants initially. There was a feeling that they found a high level forum where they can voice their concerns and problems”.

The corresponding importance of the Government integrating the input of the Reference Group was also highlighted so as to avoid cynicism:

“Enthusiasm diminishes if influence becomes limited”

Some participants suggested that the process of public engagement upon which the Reference Group was based needed to be more than just a vehicle for helping the communities understand and support what the Government was doing, but a process that could also assist government to understand the communities’ viewpoint.

2.3 Challenges

Whilst participants identified many positive impacts and outcomes, nevertheless a number of more challenging issues were raised.

Reference group members identified several issues. However, the CHRГ’s objective to engage and assist the media in its treatment of the issues in a balanced way was the most discussed topic. The following themes highlight the identified issues overall.

2.3.1 Media frustration

Even though CRC had played a role in resourcing the steering committee and others to build media relations, overall analysis of comments suggest that the CHRГ found it difficult to accomplish its objective of engaging and assisting the media in its treatment of the issues in an informed and balanced way.

However, it is to be noted that some CHRГ members had effectively participated on talkback and other forms of media, especially the Iraqi community. The following comments by participants and action/inaction undertaken highlight some of the frustrations encountered by the CHRГ.

“The community reached a level of frustration regarding negative media representation. This has become a world-wide phenomenon. There was a feeling that no matter what actions the CHRГ took, there was little that could be done regarding the enormity of the task”.

“Have to be smarter in dealing with the media. Participation in media debate can be counter-productive. It can lead to a hardening of position”.

The CRC clarified its possibilities and limitations regarding writing letters to media and the Anti-Discrimination Board (ADB). It was noted that the CRC can only write letters if the issue falls within its legislative requirements:

“Action depends on whether the recipient has the capacity to accept the CRC’s letter and whether the recipient will act on the matter addressed in the letter. The CRC cannot write a letter to the ADB if it is an issue of vilification. However, if an incident occurs which is discriminatory then the CRC can write to the ADB on the complainant’s behalf as it is of suitable interest to the CRC as defined in the Anti-Discrimination Act”.

“Journalists could be involved in the CHRG which would enable journalists to understand the bridge building and networking that is being undertaken by communities and government”

“Media is not easy to approach as it is independent and its foremost role is to sell newspapers. It is not in the media’s interest to come into the CHRG. The task of influencing the media is too great”.

“Ethnic media was invited as members to the CHRG and there was little reporting of CHRG’s activities throughout the project”.

2.3.2 Lack of Federal and Local Government Involvement

Participants also recognised that overall, communities, Federal, State and Local Governments all had complementary roles to play in implementing the objectives of the Reference Group. However, it was the view of most Reference Group members that there was either no, or limited Federal and Local Government involvement. This, it was considered, curtailed the potential for many of the activities to have broader outreach and impact than they did.

“The involvement of the Federal Government would have assisted the CHRG to tackle several issues that rest within federal jurisdiction”.

“Involvement of three tiers of government is crucial. There was reluctance for tiers of government to get involved on a political level. Maybe more could have been achieved if there was a formal cooperative structure”.

2.3.3 Impacts of State Election

Since the CHRG was bound by government protocols as it was coordinated by a government agency, it had certain limitations, especially due to the state election occurring during the height of the project. For example, issues about law and order that dominated state politics had negative ramifications.

“Community relations tends to have negative spin during elections- this may have detracted from the process”

2.3.4 Membership

It is important to state that overall, comments suggest that the Reference Group benefited enormously from the diversity of its membership by drawing on the variety of skills, knowledge, experience and perspectives that all members brought to the Group. This benefit of course is only realized in a climate of open communication based on trust, mutual respect, and commitment to a common purpose, all of which appear to have largely been achieved by the Group.

However, one comment submitted suggests that the membership of the Reference Group may have been enhanced through the involvement of ‘mainstream’ Anglo-Australian organisations, such as various Churches, or the Salvation Army. Clearly, if the Group is to continue to meet, then membership issues may need to be revisited.

3. future issues

3.1 Where to From Here?

Since the CHRГ was formed as a short term strategy to coordinate responses for generating and maintaining community harmony during conflict, some members do not see the need for the CHRГ to continue.

However, some others think that the CHRГ is a valuable communication mechanism and should be maintained long term. The following comments and suggestions highlight the differing views.

“Strength of the CHRГ was commonality of issue (Iraq/Bali). It is difficult to maintain the group if the issue no longer exists.”

“Closure of the CHRГ may reflect negatively on the community. The CHRГ was formed because there was crisis, this crisis has not abated yet and the closure of the CHRГ will have a fallout.”

One participant submitted that the group should continue to meet but in the form of a Standing Committee. The Standing Committee would allow continuity of a key group of people who have forged close links to keep each other informed of current issues in the wider community and thus be prepared, if the need should arise:

“to confer on any major community issue that may arise in these somewhat turbulent and uncertain times.”

3.1.1 Future Role

Clearly, the future role, if any of the CHRГ will need to be discussed further if consensus is to be reached.

Comments below convey the range of views and opinions expressed by participants:

“The CHRГ is hard to maintain. The CRC could be a facilitator in intervention, consultation and with media. CRC could work with HREOC, media and police. If issues arise, then key people and key agencies can be involved”

“The CHRГ should not be viewed as the mechanism for which people report incidents of harassment or incidents where police response allegedly has not been sufficient. This should be done through area commands”.

“The CHRГ’s reason for existence has served its purpose. Possibly an unstructured model can be maintained where if crisis occurred a meeting can be called, or meetings called on a quarterly or half yearly basis, where speakers could be invited and the broader subject of community relations could be discussed”.

3.1.2 CRC’s Vision

In an effort to explore future directions, the CRC has committed to assessing the possibility of initiating a Sydney based forum, similar to that of the Regional Advisory Councils with an approximate membership of 30 to 40 people from diverse communities to exchange information. It will extend beyond the communities represented by the CHRГ.

4. summary of evaluation

Comments received during the evaluation seminar have highlighted that the establishment of the CHRG was highly valuable in forming meaningful relationships between community and government.

The key role played by the CRC in establishing, resourcing and maintaining the group seems to have assisted in building community relations and overall harmony in times of conflict.

The CHRG has also proved to be valuable in channelling communication to and from the communities that have been affected by the issues.

Additional 'successes' identified include:

- Opportunity for members of the CHRG to develop and promote leadership through a number of different means on the issue of community harmony at a critical point in international and domestic developments
- Building consensus on the development of community harmony goals and strategies as a basis for broader community participation
- Expanding the knowledge and skills among community members for planning and local activities
- Building linkages among relevant community, government and non-government institutions, including educational facilities.

However, despite the many positive outcomes, the continuation of negative media reporting and the lack of mainstream media representation in the CHRG seem to add to the frustration of group members and the communities they represent. The CHRG sees the task of influencing media very difficult.

The question of where to from here for the CHRG also attracted a diverse range of views and opinions. Some view the CHRG as a short term strategy pertinent and relevant only during crisis times. However, others see a continuing role for CHRG in generating and maintaining community relations.

The involvement of the government in the CHRG is seen to be its strength, particularly in relation to support and allocation of resources if activities and momentum are to be sustained. The CRC has a vision to host a Sydney based forum with representation from 30-40 diverse communities.

The importance of working proactively to build relationships with the media during peace times has been a key theme in discussions. It has been emphasised that the CHRG could work in partnership with institutions such as HREOC, the media and the police to facilitate positive community relations.

Finally, the need to build in success indicators at the outset of a process cannot be overstated. Integrating agreed measurements or indicators can enhance considerably the success of any evaluation process that may be undertaken at the conclusion of the project.

Further in depth macro and micro level analysis may bring forth additional knowledge about the effectiveness of the CHRG. However, within the limited scope of this evaluation it can be stated that the establishment of the CHRG and its practical undertakings to respond to community issues on a short-term basis have been overwhelmingly successful. The issue of working in partnership with mainstream media might have been an overstated short-term objective. Engaging and assisting the media to report matters in a balanced way will require considerable planning/strategising on the part of government and relevant community groups.

5. appendix

Community Agencies

Affinity Intercultural Association
Ahamadiyya Muslim Assoc. of Australia
Al-Nahar
Auburn Mosque
Australian Arabic Communities Council
Australian Federation of Islamic Councils
Australian Jewish News
El Telegraph
Executive Council of Australian Jewry
Fair Go Australia Ltd
Forum on Australia's Islamic Relations
Future
Iraqi Migrants Council
Islamic Charity Projects Association
Islamic Council of NSW
Islamic Egyptian Society
Islamic Welfare Centre
Lebanese Community Council
Lebanese Moslem Association
Middle East Radio FM 87.6
Muslim Community Radio
Muslim Women's National Network
Muslim Women's Association
National Council of Australian Jewish Women
NSW Anglican Church
NSW Board of Jewish Progressive Rabbis
NSW Ecumencial Church
NSW Jewish Board of Deputies
Riverwood Australian Arabic Association
Sikh Association of Sydney
State Zionist Council of NSW
Supreme Islamic Council
The Great Synagogue
Turkish News Weekly
Turkish Organisations Council
Zetland Mosque

Government Agencies

Community Relations Commission For a multicultural NSW
NSW Anti-Discrimination Board
NSW Department of Education and Training
NSW Department of Community Services
NSW Police

APPENDIX G – List of Participants

Mr Mahmood Ahmed	Ahmadiyyah Muslim Association
Mr Anton Sabella	Al-Nahar
Mr Hassan Bazzi	Al-Zahra Muslim Association
Mrs Fatima Hamdan	Al-Zahra Muslim Women's Association
Mr John Hill	Anti Discrimination Board
Ms Michelle Nemeç	Association of Independent Schools
Ms Latifa Craig	Auburn Gallipoli Mosque
Ms Elif Bruzesse	Auburn Gallipoli Mosque
Mr Mehmet Ozalp	Affinity Intercultural Association
Mr Hassan Moussa	Australian Arabic Communities Council
Ms Randa Kattan	Australian Arabic Communities Council
Mr (Kuranda) Sayed Safit	Forum on Australia's Islamic Relations
Mr Amjad Mehboob	Australian Federation of Islamic Councils
Mr Vic Alhadef	Australian Jewish News
Mr Gafoor Mohammed	Australian Kurdish Association
Ms Rosalie Nott	Catholic Education Commission
Mr Edmund Taouk	Channel 31
Dr Jamal Rifi	Commissioner, CRC
Ms Marta Aquino	Commissioner, CRC
Ms Ezel Jupiter	Commissioner, CRC
Ms Therese Le-Dang	Commissioner, CRC
Mr Nedjelko Maruncic OAM	Commissioner, CRC
Mr Michael Marx AM	Commissioner, CRS
Ms Paula Masselos	Commissioner, CRC
Mr Henry Pan OAM	Commissioner, CRC
Mr Stepan Kerkyasharian AM	Community Relations Commission
Mr Richard Acheson	Community Relations Commission
Mr Warren Duncan	Community Relations Commission
Ms Georgina Gold	Community Relations Commission
Mr John Telford	Community Relations Commission
Mr Victor Duranti	Community Relations Commission
Ms Sarah Ralston	Community Relations Commission
Ms Samira Ghabar	Council of Australian Palestinian Organisations
Mr Abe Quadan	Council of Australian Palestinian Organisations
Ms Eija Roti	Department of Community Services
Mr John Macmillan	Department of Community Services
Mr George Green	Department of Education and Training
Ms Hanya Stefaniuk	Department of Education and Training
Mr Hani El Turk	El Telegraph
Mr Jeremy Jones	Executive Council of Australian Jewry
Mr Alan Gold	Fair Go Australia
Mr Joe Houry	Future
Mr Kassim Abood	Iraqi Migrants Association
Mr Gaby Jajatieh	Islamic Charity Projects Association
Mr Ali Roudé	Islamic Council of NSW
Mr Essam Mohammed	Islamic Egyptian Society
Sheikh Khalil Chami	Islamic Welfare Centre
Mr Jamal Salameh	Lebanese Community Council
Mr Keysar Trad	Lebanese Moslem Association

Mr Joe Semrani	Middle East Radio FM
Mr Mohammed Mehio	Muslim Community Radio
Ms Maha Abdo	Muslim Women's Association
Ms Wafa Zaim	Muslim Women's Association
Ms Genan Dadoun	Muslim Women's Association
Ms Aziza Abdel-Halim	Muslim Women's National Network of Australia
Ms Miriam Stein	National Council of Australian Jewish Women
Ms Sue Cohen	National Council of Australian Jewish Women
Archdeacon Ernie Carnaby	NSW Anglican Church
Rabbi Allison Conyer	NSW Board of Jewish Progressive Rabbis
Reverend Dr Ray Williamson	NSW Ecumenical Church
Mr Daniel Hoenig	NSW Jewish Board of Deputies
Commissioner Ken Moroney	NSW Police
Supt. Garry Dobson	NSW Police
Mr David Evanian Thomas	NSW Police
Det. Superintendent Carolyn Smith	NSW Police, Protective Security Group
Commander John Richardson	NSW Police
Commander Alan Clarke	NSW Police
Mr Khodr Saleh	Riverwood Australian Arabic Association
Mr Ajmer Singh Gill	Sri Guru Singh Sabha Sikh Association of Sydney
Mr Sukhinder Singh	Sri Guru Singh Sabha Sikh Association of Sydney
Mr Brian Levitan	State Zionist Council of NSW
Mr Yosi Tal	State Zionist Council of NSW
Mr Dawood Goddard	Supreme Islamic Council
Mr Abdallah Tabbaa	Supreme Islamic Council
Mr Gabr Elgafi	Supreme Islamic Council
Mr Farouk Choudhury	Supreme Islamic Council
Rabbi Raymond Apple	The Great Synagogue
Mr Farouk Kassar	The Muslim Council of NSW
Ms Arzu Agacayak	Turkish News Weekly
Mr Dursun Candemir	Turkish Organisations Council
Imam Amin Hady	Zetland Mosque

Hotline staff/bilingual counselors

Maha Hamad
 Nadya Stani
 Fadia Abboud
 Rana Sayed

APPENDIX H – Community Harmony Reference Group meeting dates

List of meeting dates

Community Harmony Reference Group

- 21 October 2002
- 19 December 2002
- 18 February 2003
- 12 March 2003
- 24 March 2003
- 17 June 2003

Community Harmony Steering Committee

- 1 November 2002
- 21 November 2002
- 10 December 2002
- 14 January 2003
- 13 February 2003

Community Relations Crisis Management Plan

- 17 December 2002
- 24 January 2003
- 13 February 2003
- 20 February 2003
- 21 February 2003
- 6 March 2003
- 11 March 2003
- 18 June 2003
- 24 September 2003

Arabic and Islamic Working Group

- 19 November 2002
- 10 December 2002
- 21 January 2003
- 6 February 2003
- 24 February 2003
- 13 March 2003
- 3 April 2003

Education working group

- 27 November 2002
- 16 December 2002
- 18 December 2002 (CEC and AIS)
- 23 January 2003
- 26 February 2003
- 11 March 2003

Public Discourse working group

- 3 December 2002
- 16 January 2003
- 17 March 2003

APPENDIX I – Cost and Impact

The Community Harmony Reference Group was funded from the Commission's existing budget. It was stated in Labor's Citizenship policy that recurrent initiatives, including the Community Harmony Reference Group, are funded from existing departmental forward estimates and have no impact on projected budget results.

The Premier wrote to the Treasurer seeking additional funding on 15 November 2002 for the operations of the initiative and Treasury declined the request.

July 2002 - June 2003

Expenses	Description	Cost
Total payroll expenses	Hotline staff	57,330
Operating expenditure	Travel Taxi Courier Advertising Telephone Printing Hospitality	9,516
TOTAL		66,845

July 2003 - 9 October 2003

Expenses	Description	Cost
Total payroll expenses	Hotline staff	0
Operating expenditure	Travel Taxi Courier Advertising Telephone Printing Hospitality	3,000 (Approximate)
TOTAL		3,000