

Statement of Affairs

THIS STATEMENT was prepared in pursuance of Section 14 (1) (a) of the Freedom of Information Act, 1989. Its aim is to provide an overview of the activities of the Community Relations Commission For a multicultural NSW and to provide to the public or clients of the Commission an indication of when FOI procedures may, or need not, be necessary.

Establishment

The Community Relations Commission For a multicultural NSW was established in terms of the Community Relations Commission and Principles of Multiculturalism Act 2000 and commenced operation on 13 March 2001.

The Community Relations Commission and Principles of Multiculturalism Act 2000 provides for the appointment by the Governor of up to nine Commissioners. As at 30 June 2002, the Commission consists of one full-time Chairperson, one part-time Deputy Chairperson, and seven part-time commissioners.

Commissioners are appointed on the basis of their qualifications, experience, and knowledge and sensitivity to multicultural issues.

The Community Relations Commission For a multicultural NSW is responsible for promoting community harmony, participation and access to services so that the contribution of cultural diversity to New South Wales is recognised and celebrated.

Objectives and Functions

The objectives and functions of the Commission are detailed in part 3, sections 12 and 13 of the Community Relations Commission and Principles of Multiculturalism Act

The objectives of the Commission are:

- (a) participation of the people of New South Wales in community life and the public decision-making process so that they can exercise their rights and fulfil their obligations,
- (b) access to government and community services that is equitable and that has regard to the linguistic, religious, racial and ethnic diversity of the people of New South Wales,
- (c) the promotion of a cohesive and harmonious multicultural society with mutual respect for and understanding of cultural diversity,
- (d) the enrichment of all sections of society through the benefits of cultural diversity,

- (e) the promotion of the principles of multiculturalism and the advantages of a multicultural society,
- (f) the promotion of social justice, community development and community initiatives for ethnic communities in New South Wales.

The functions of the Commission are:

- (a) to undertake systematic and wide-ranging consultation with people and groups with respect to its objectives,
- (b) to advise and make recommendations to the Minister to promote any of its objectives,
- (c) to investigate and report to the Minister on any matter relating to its objectives that the Commission considers appropriate or that the Minister refers to the Commission for investigation and report,
- (d) to arrange and participate in forums to promote its objectives,
- (e) to facilitate co-operative arrangements involving governmental, business, educational and community groups or bodies to promote its objectives,
- (f) to enter into agreements with public authorities in connection with their functions to promote the objectives of the Commission (including, but not limited to, the objective relating to access to government services),
- (g) to assist, and assess the effectiveness of, public authorities in observing the principles of multiculturalism in the conduct of their affairs, particularly in connection with the delivery of government services,
- (h) to assist in resolving issues associated with cultural diversity,
- (i) to provide interpreter or other services approved by the Minister,
- (j) to advise the Minister on the most effective use of funds appropriated by Parliament for programs related to its objectives (including funds for the provision of resources to community groups that promote the objectives of the Commission),
- (k) to support community initiatives that promote the objectives of the Commission,
- (l) to encourage eligible people to become Australian citizens,
- (m) to advise and make recommendations to the Anti-Discrimination Board on matters relating to discrimination and racial vilification ,
- (n) such other functions as are conferred or imposed on it by or under this or any other Act.

Organisation

In order to carry out the functions prescribed under the Community Relations Commission and Principles of Multiculturalism Act 2000, the Commission operates as an administrative office under the Public Sector Management Act. Its structure includes : Community Relations Service, Information and Management Services, Language Services, Human Resource Services, Financial Services and Multicultural Marketing and Business.

In addition, section 20 of the Act allows for the establishment of committees of commissioners or commissioners and other persons as required to assist the Commission to carry out its functions.

For the financial year ending 30 June 2002 the Commission operated on a total annual budget (accrual) of \$12 million. This is funded by a recurrent allocation of \$9 million, \$1 million reimbursement from consolidated fund entity and user charges of \$2 million. The Commission's operating budget comprises employee related costs of \$9 million, and \$2 million other operating expenses. In the 2001-2002 financial year the Commission had a budget of \$1 million for grants. See also the appendix *Schedule of Major Assets*.

The Commission has offices at:

- 164 Liverpool Road, Ashfield (head office). Telephone (02) 9716 2222.
- 175-183 Castlereagh Street, Sydney. Telephone (02) 8255 6767.
- 84 Crown Street, Wollongong. Telephone (02) 4224 9922.
- 117 Bull Street, Newcastle. Telephone (02) 4929 4191.

Advisory Committees and Sub-Committees

Refer also to the diagram *Organisational Structure – Boards and Committees*.

Regional Advisory Councils

The Commission operates regional advisory councils to enable enhanced community input into policy formulation and community comment on prevailing regional issues. These councils cover the the Albury, Central West, Griffith, Hornsby - Wyong, Hunter, Illawarra, Macarthur - Liverpool, Nepean - Blacktown, New England, and Northern regions. They are convened by part-time commissioners and their recommendations are brought to the attention of the Commission.

Grants Advisory Committee

The role of the Commission's Grants Advisory Committee is to assist in the process of assessment of applications submitted under the Commission's Community Development Grants Program.

The Committee comprises community representatives and meets to consider and make recommendations to the Commission based on the criteria and priority areas for funding stated in the guidelines of the grants program.

Structure and Activities of the Community Relations Commission For a multicultural NSW

Refer also to the diagram *Organisation Structure – Functional*.

Community Relations Service

The Community Relations Service promotes the development and implementation of community relations policies across the spectrum of government activities, as outlined in the Community Relations Commission and Principles of Multiculturalism Act 2000.

The Community Relations Service develops model projects with communities and partnership organisations based on the goals of the Act.

This division includes the Regional Coordinators for southern NSW, western NSW and northern NSW.

Information and Management Services

I&MS is the primary contact between the Commission and the office of the Premier and Minister for Citizenship. It is responsible for the maintenance of efficient and effective communication between the Commission and the office of the Minister.

The areas of responsibility of I&MS include:

- Quality management
- Ministerial liaison
- Grants administration
- Executive support
- Training and education
- Freedom of Information

- Corporate and strategic planning
- Annual report coordination
- Media and public relations
- Publications
- Library administration
- Information technology
- Records management

The Commission's commitment to improved customer service continued to be a main focus in the implementation of quality across the organisation. Quality issues are an integral part of the corporate planning process.

Language Services

The primary objective and function of Language Services is to provide efficient, cost-effective and quality interpreting and translating services to all people and agencies within NSW, to ensure full participation in community life.

The services are available to all State Government agencies, private and commercial organisations, community groups and individuals.

Services are provided on a user-pays basis, with exemptions granted on a needs basis.

The interpreting service is available 24 hours a day.

Financial Services

Financial and accommodation services are managed by this unit. Responsibilities include budgeting, financial management, risk management, purchasing, asset control, and accommodation.

Human Resources Services

This unit has the responsibility for staffing and human resource management.

Planning Mechanisms.

The following planning mechanisms are in place in respect of the Community Relations Commission For a multicultural NSW:

- (1) Meetings of the Commission are convened monthly (or more often if required) to determine policy and priorities.
- (2) The meetings of the Commission's senior executive staff play a major role in planning the activities of the Commission. These meetings are held weekly and provide a venue for the planning of day to day activities of the Commission.
- (3) The 2002-2006 Corporate Plan identifies the goals of the Commission and outlines strategies to ensure the achievement of the corporate objectives and the relevance to the Government's community relations objectives articulated in the Community Relations Commission and Principles of Multiculturalism Act 2000 and the Green Paper, *Cultural Harmony – The Next Decade 2002-2012*.
- (4) The Government's Green Paper, *Cultural Harmony – The Next Decade 2002-2012* outlines proposal's for the future direction of community relations in NSW. It contains recommendations flowing from the evaluation of the Ethnic Affairs Action Plan 2000. The Green Paper proposes a new plan, the Community Relations Plan of Action 2012, which will be based on four objectives. These clearly articulate the government's aims and the results expected from NSW Government agencies. The four objectives identified in the Green Paper are:
 1. leadership to encourage and value a culturally diverse society through the establishment of supportive policy, legal and planning frameworks
 2. community harmony
 3. access and equity within a framework of social justice obligations
 4. economic and cultural opportunities.

To ensure the timely and efficient implementation of the Community Relations Action Plan 2012, the Government requires key agencies to provide Ethnic Affairs Priorities Statements (EAPS) to the Commission. Each EAPS will indicate the recent achievements of the agency in implementing the four objectives, as well as foreshadowing the initiatives that will be undertaken.

To ensure that EAPS are publicly accessible and fully implemented into the core business of all government agencies, the Government requires that all agencies, including statutory authorities, provide an EAPS statement in their annual reports. Furthermore, the Commission is required to annually produce a report to Parliament on the state of community relations in New South Wales.

- (5) The annual Community Relations Forum is the major consultative event on the NSW multicultural calendar. The Commission organises the Forum as part of its legislative responsibility to consult systematically and widely with the people of New South Wales.

The Forum seeks participation from key community organisations from rural, regional and metropolitan NSW.

The Commission is sensitive to community response to its policy decisions. Community Relations Service staff provide information on community reaction. In addition, the Commission provides a community media review service to provide feedback on community reaction.

In the interests of customer service, Language Services monitors standards for translation and interpreting by meeting with clients and networking closely with major clients. This provides a clear indication of customer needs and satisfaction with services.

The Corporate Plan outlines a series of goals and strategies of the Commission for the period from 2002 to 2006.

The annual report provides feedback on the Commission's performance using pre-determined performance indicators.

Effect of the Commission's Functions on Members of the Public

The Commission's functions affect the public in the following ways:

- The provision of interpreter and translation services has immediate benefit for non-English speaking clients of the Commission both in personal matters and in their dealings with government departments.
- Community relations policies and programs in the NSW public sector are based on the Community Relations Commission and Principles of Multiculturalism Act 2000. The Act incorporates four Principles of multiculturalism and makes the chief executive officers of public sector agencies responsible for the implementation of the principles.
- The Act seeks to ensure that the public sector is responsive to the needs of, and the opportunities created by, a culturally diverse society.
- The Commission's community relations programs are an avenue by which the needs of community groups may be brought to the attention of the government.
- The Commission administers a library, both print-based and electronic. Print-based materials are no longer available to staff and clients as a result of a fire in January 2002. The Commission is planning a new, electronic library which will be accessible via the internet.
- The Commission accepts submissions on matters relating to community relations, and is prepared to examine them in the context of Government policy.

Arrangements for Public Participation in Policy Formulation

The Commission welcomes the comments of the public on issues relating to community relations and service delivery. This is achieved through the activities of its regional advisory councils, the conduct of seminars and forums, and the distribution of documents for public discussion.

When vacancies arise, membership of the regional advisory councils is invited through advertisements placed in the press, including the ethnic and regional press.

Community members of regional advisory councils are appointed for three years.

Description of the Types of Documents Held by the Commission

A (i) The following documents are held at the Commission and are available free of charge to the public.

- Policy documents and guidelines on the Commission's grants programs
- Green Paper, *Cultural Harmony – The Next Decade 2002-2012*
- Corporate Plan 2002-2006
- Annual reports
- Guidelines for exemptions from payment for language services
- Guidelines for the operation of Regional Advisory Councils

Commission reports and publications on a range of matters such as religious development in NSW, Community Relations Report 2001, Keynote Address by Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AO, Governor of New South Wales, and others are available.

(ii) Documents available for purchase

A small number of Commission publications are also available for purchase, including *The People of New South Wales - Statistics from the 1996 Census*, which provides a statistical profile of each local government area in the State.

A full list of Commission publications is available from the Commission's Public Information Officer.

B The following documents are not normally available for public inspection:

- departmental files and records which include correspondence and file notes in respect of all of the Commission's operations.
- agendas and minutes of Commission meetings.
- departmental files in respect of staff recruitment, staff training, and staff members personal files and information.
- departmental files containing information on grant applications, and assessments of applications.
- background notes on ethnic community groups.
- documentation on requests for translations.
- documentation on interpreting assignments.

Information is stored at the Commission's offices as either paper files or as computer records.

Access Arrangements, Procedures and Points of Contact

The documents listed under part A are available from the Commission's Public Information Officer, who is located at level one, 164 Liverpool Road, Ashfield. The telephone number is (02) 9716 2127, Monday to Friday between 9.30 am and 4.30 pm.

If access to documents listed under part B is required in the context of the Freedom of Information legislation, an approach should be made to the Freedom of Information Officer at level one, 164 Liverpool Road, Ashfield. The telephone number is (02) 9716 2747 during the same hours of business on weekdays.

Charges for access to the documents are in accordance with the guidelines established by the Freedom of Information manual:

NATURE OF APPLICATION	APPLICATION FEE	PROCESSING CHARGE
Access to records by natural persons about their personal affairs.	\$30 ¹	\$30 per hour after first twenty hours ¹
All other requests	\$30 ¹	\$30 per hour *
Internal review ³	\$40 ^{1, 2}	Nil
Amendment of records	Nil ²	Nil

¹ subject to 50% reduction for financial hardship and public interest reasons. Pensioners who hold Health Benefits card as well as those applicants with an income who are considered to be under financial hardship are entitled to the rebate.

² refunds may apply as a result of successful internal reviews and successful applications for amendment of records.

³ application fees will not be charged for internal reviews in relation to amendment of records.