

Policing in a Culturally Diverse Australia

Governing Principles

PREAMBLE

This document was prepared for the Conference of Commissioners of Police of Australasia and the South West Pacific Region, by the National Police Ethnic Advisory Bureau in co-operation with members of the Bureau's Advisory Panel.

The principles outlined in this document provide police jurisdictions in Australia with a philosophical framework for the development of policies and projects enhancing harmonious relations between police and ethnic communities in Australasia.

The adoption of the guiding principles by police jurisdictions in Australia demonstrates their clear commitment to a culturally diverse Australia.

The document addresses major areas covered by the first National Conference on "Police Services in a Multicultural Australia", Melbourne 28 - 31 August, 1990.

Throughout the document references are made to "Australians". The term refers to all residents of Australia.

INTRODUCTION

Few countries in the world have depended on immigration for their socio - economic growth and development to the same extent as Australia. In a real sense, the history of Australia since the first European settlement in 1788 has been the history of immigration. As a result, Australia is one of the most ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse societies in the world.

The diversity of the Australian population is clearly evident:-

- ◆ almost 25 per cent of Australians are non-English speaking background immigrants or the children of non-English speaking background immigrants;
- ◆ nearly four million Australians were born overseas, more than half of them from non-English speaking backgrounds;
- ◆ almost two in five Australians have at least one parent born overseas; and
- ◆ 14 per cent of people over the age of five speak a language other than English at home, with 2.7 per cent of the total Australian population either unable to speak the English language or at all.

In order to address the reality and implications of Australia's cultural diversity, successive governments in Australia have introduced a range of multicultural policies - policies which help us better manage our diversity in the interests of social cohesion, and justice and harness the skills of all Australians for the national good.

A landmark in the development of our multicultural policy was the release in 1989 by the Commonwealth Government, of the National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia.

It is important for police as service providers to understand and respond to this historical policy which is built around eight underlying principles of multiculturalism which apply equally to all Australians:-

1. All Australians should have a commitment to Australia and share responsibility for furthering our national interests.
2. All Australians should be able to enjoy the basic right of freedom from discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion or culture.
3. All Australians should enjoy equal life chances and have equitable access to and an equitable share of the resources which governments manage on behalf of the community.
4. All Australians should have the opportunity to fully participate in society and in the decisions which directly affect them.
5. All Australians should be able to develop and make use of their potential for Australia's economic and social development.
6. All Australians should have the opportunity to acquire and develop proficiency in English and languages other than English, and to develop cross-cultural understanding.
7. All Australians should be able to develop and share their cultural heritage.
8. Australian institutions should acknowledge, reflect and respond to the cultural diversity of the Australian community.

At the same time, it needs to be stressed that there are also defined boundaries for Australian multiculturalism, such as:-

- ◆ multicultural policies require all Australians to accept the basic structures and principles of Australian society - the Constitution and the rule of law, tolerance and equality, Parliamentary democracy, freedom of speech and religion, English as the national language and equality of the sexes; and
- ◆ multicultural policies impose obligations as well as conferring rights; the right to express one's own culture and beliefs involves a reciprocal responsibility to accept the right of others to express their views and values.

Whilst diversity makes Australia an exciting, colourful and vibrant society, it also presents challenges to service providers such as police, to deliver services that are relevant, culturally sensitive and easily accessible to all Australians irrespective of their backgrounds.

The close partnership with the community has long been acknowledged by police jurisdictions in Australia to be a vital ingredient to community involvement policing. A culturally diverse society requires police to adapt to diversity and develop new skills in communicating with, and serving all groups within that society.

As key institutions in society are charged with safeguarding the rights and freedom of individuals, police must advance their skills, knowledge and competence to respond professionally to the diversity of Australians.

PRINCIPLES

Principle 1

Cross - Cultural Awareness Training and Development

Police jurisdictions in Australia are committed to provide services with professionalism and in a manner responsive to the needs of a culturally diverse community.

It is recognised that adequately resourced and professionally delivered cross-cultural awareness training should be fully integrated in education and training courses for police to ensure the development of cross - cultural understanding and skills essential for modern-day policing in a culturally diverse Australia.

The cross-cultural skills of members of Australian police jurisdictions will be enhanced through education and training providing information on the facts of Australian society and the strategies for managing cultural diversity, addressing such issues as cross-cultural communication, conflict resolution, community relations, racism, values, attitudes and human behaviour as shaped by cultural, religious and other beliefs and values.

The professional development of police members wishing to undertake formal study of approved courses in community languages or other courses increasing their cross-cultural skills will be encouraged.

Principle 2

Communication

The underlying philosophy behind the communication principle is the recognition by police jurisdictions in Australia is:-

- ◆ the right of all people to understand and to be understood in their interaction with police;
- ◆ the right of all people to have a good understanding of the positive role and services of police in a democratic country like Australia as distinct from the negative role played by oppressive police forces in some overseas countries of origin.

Police jurisdictions in Australia will endeavour to advance community understanding of the police services / practices and procedures through community education and information strategies.

In order to facilitate communication with all Australians, police jurisdictions in Australia are committed to the provision of the most effective means of communication, including the use of appropriately qualified and accredited interpreters and / or translators. Every effort will be made to train police on “how to work effectively with interpreters”.

Every care will be taken to ensure that all forms of communication will not include stereotyping and language which might generally be interpreted as offensive by ethnic communities.

Principle 3

Media Relations

Police jurisdictions in Australia acknowledge that inaccurate and stereotyping media reporting has a harmful effect on community relations. Particular care will therefore be taken by police in their interaction with the media to avoid perpetuating stereotypes as in descriptions of persons, and to ensure accurate portrayal of the Australian cultural diversity.

Every effort will be made to ensure that a more positive outcome is forthcoming from all areas of the media.

Police jurisdictions recognise the important role performed by the ethnic media in Australia. Every effort will be made to utilise ethnic print and electronic media to communicate with the ethnic communities.

Principle 4

Recruitment

Police jurisdictions in Australia are committed to the principle that modern day policing in a culturally diverse society requires the composition of police personnel to reflect as closely as possible, without compromising professional standards, the cultural and linguistic composition of Australian society.

The better reflection of the diverse population within the ranks of Australian police jurisdictions will be a factor in effective police / community relations, effective delivery of police services and long term success in achieving corporate goals.

It is recognised however, that people from different ethnic backgrounds are generally not recruited to police their individual ethnic communities but rather to provide police service to a total community.

Although every effort will be made to encourage recruitment from ethnic communities, applicant must be able to satisfy the relevant selection criteria including any entry examinations.

Police jurisdictions in Australia will ensure that all recruitment policies, practices and standards are equitable and free from any racial and / or cultural bias which may favour one segment of the community over another.

Principle 5

Consultation and Liaison

Police jurisdictions in Australia are committed to close partnership with the community.

Police jurisdictions in Australia recognise that for police services to be responsive to the needs of a culturally diverse community, every effort has to be made to encourage community participation in relevant policy and program development.

Consultation with ethnic communities' structures in particular is essential for the development and implementation of policies and programs in the area of police / ethnic relations. It is important for police to also actively seek feedback from ethnic communities on the effectiveness and relevancy of policies and programs.

In order to advance consultation and liaison processes, every effort will be made to encourage ethnic community representation on such police / community bodies as Police Community Consultative Committees and similar forums.

Principle 6

Racism and Discrimination

Police jurisdictions in Australia unequivocally reject all forms of racism, prejudice and bigotry and declare any racist behaviour by police members as professionally unacceptable.

To this end every effort will be made to make clear in police standing orders or similar regulations the unacceptability of racially motivated conduct by police personnel and that such behaviour will be treated as a breach of instructions.

Police jurisdictions in Australia are committed to do their utmost within legislative limits to combat racism and unlawful discrimination and to actively promote harmonious relations with all sections of Australian culturally diverse community.



Police jurisdictions in Australia will ensure that the principles outlined in this document are appropriately reflected in policing policy such as codes of ethics and administrative, operational, training and recruitment procedures. This will ensure that the principles are acknowledged, understood, accepted and put into practice by all police officers and will positively effect the quality of police service to ethnic communities.