



GOVERNMENT OF  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

# WA CHARTER OF MULTICULTURALISM

November 2004

# ABOUT THE WA CHARTER OF MULTICULTURALISM

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## *Background to the Charter*

Multiculturalism as a concept that informs public policy is not new. However, there is little consensus as to what “multiculturalism” means; the philosophies that underpin the policy and how it shapes the development and delivery of services by Government; what implications it may have for the procedures of recruitment, selection and promotion; and finally what measures indicate that the principles of multiculturalism are being realised.

The Charter addresses some of the challenges posed by the concept of multiculturalism, and from a broad perspective these include:

- the many differing definitions associated with multiculturalism that have emerged over the past two decades, some of which have resulted in confusion, and at times, discontent amongst Western Australians;
- the lack of recognition of the unique status of Aboriginal people as the first Australians in previous policies relating to multiculturalism;
- the perception that multiculturalism refers to a policy perspective that relates specifically and only to people who are perceived to be of a particular cultural, linguistic or ethnic background;
- the prevalence of a myth that multiculturalism is about giving special treatment to some minorities;
- the belief by some sections of the population that cultural uniformity is a necessary prerequisite for societal unity; and
- the association of multiculturalism primarily with the practice and preservation of traditional cultures.

The Charter has been developed under the auspices of the Anti-Racism Strategy Steering Group, chaired by the Hon. Premier and Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Interests, Dr Geoff Gallop. The Draft Charter was released for comment to the community and the public sector; and has been refined on the basis of the feedback received.

## *Purpose of the Charter of Multiculturalism*

The purpose of the Charter is to explicitly recognise that the people of Western Australia are of different linguistic, religious, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and to promote their participation in democratic governance within an inclusive society.

Despite the adoption of policies on multiculturalism for some decades, there is still a lack of appreciation that the needs of Indigenous people and people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse background can be different, and that flexibility in service provision is required to cater to these differences. It is important to note that the flexibility in service arrangements to cater to different needs does not necessarily translate to parallel services.

The Charter represents a significant shift in the direction of multicultural policy in Western Australia. Its premise is not cultural pluralism but a democratic pluralism that recognises difference as a hallmark of democracy, both at an institutional and individual level. It takes into account the varying needs that may arise from this pluralism. The Charter signals the necessity to adopt different approaches to respond appropriately to these varying needs in order to ensure that all people can participate fully in society.

The Charter reflects citizenship as both a status and a practice. The status of citizenship confers rights and duties upon members of a community, while the practice of citizenship refers to 'practices' that govern relationships between the individual and the state as well as between individuals. The practice of citizenship can be inhibited by structural barriers, including those relating to socio-economic and cultural variables. To address this issue, the Charter moves beyond a universal citizenship which confers upon all citizens, irrespective of difference, equal rights and status within a political community but which gives little importance to people's particular circumstances such as gender, ethnicity, religion etc. In its place the Charter adopts a democratic citizenship that reflects sensitivity to different needs, claims and interests within the accepted principles, practices, and legal norms of the broader political community.

The Charter enables and facilitates the:

- recognition that a cohesive and inclusive society depends on mutual respect between individuals and between groups;
- empowerment of all Western Australians as free and equal members of society by assisting the removal of barriers to participation; and
- acknowledgement of differences such as ethnicity and language, while at the same time emphasising a sense of community membership and common civic culture, and enjoying the rights and duties of a democratic citizenship.

### *Inclusion of the Statement of Commitment with the Charter*

Aboriginal peoples and their cultures are a unique part of the State of Western Australia. In 2001 the Government of Western Australia and the Western Australian ATSI Council signed a Statement of Commitment to work together to build a new and just relationship between the Aboriginal people of Western Australia and the Government of Western Australia. The Statement sets out principles and a process for the parties to negotiate a State-wide framework based on the commitment of the parties to effective and sustainable partnership. Recognition of the continuing rights and responsibilities of Aboriginal people as the first peoples of Western Australia and as citizens is a fundamental principle underlying the Charter.

### *International Instruments*

The principles of the Charter are consistent with international instruments that have been ratified by the Commonwealth Government of Australia. The Charter reflects principles that inform legal practice and State and Commonwealth laws such as the Commonwealth *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* and the Western Australian *Equal Opportunity Act 1984*. It also reflects those key international instruments to which Australia is a signatory. These include:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
- The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination;

- Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief;
- The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and
- The International Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### *Commitment*

Recognising Aboriginal peoples as the First Australians whose lands and waters we share, the Government of Western Australia affirms its commitment to multiculturalism in a democratic society, whose members are drawn from diverse cultural, linguistic, religious, and historical traditions.

In pursuing the Principles and Objectives of the Charter the Government of Western Australia rejects 'race' as a means of making distinctions between people and between groups; and is opposed to all manifestations of racism. Equally, it recognises the historical bases of ethnic identities and the role of ethnicity in shaping contemporary societies. The Government accepts that pride in a distinctive ethnic heritage, and possession of an ethnic identity and culture, is in no way a hindrance to sharing a common national identity and a commitment to being Australian. The Government acknowledges that Western Australians are primarily bound together by the principles and practices that govern relations between individuals and between individuals and the State, and not by a loyalty to a common culture and heritage which can vary not only between groups but even between people perceived to be of the same group.

Over the last decade and beyond much has been learnt about the nature and impact of institutional barriers. At their core lie the unthinking continuation of routine organisational practices that *in their effect* can be discriminatory. The essential lesson of institutional barriers is that we may unknowingly discriminate. In promoting equal participation, and enabling all Western Australians to enjoy all aspects of society, the Government of Western Australia will seek to identify and eliminate institutional barriers wherever they exist.

# VISION

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A society in which respect for mutual difference is accompanied by equality of opportunity within a framework of democratic citizenship.

## RATIONALE FOR THE CHARTER

In the initial phase of giving recognition to human rights principles and practices in liberal democracies such as Australia, Governments attempted to ensure that citizens were not prevented from enjoying their rights. More recently, human rights principles and practices are utilised by Governments to do such things as will *enable* citizens to exercise their rights. In this context the Charter acknowledges that while the principles of access and equity and the concept of *formal citizenship* may define the rights and obligations of citizenship, they do not ensure the exercise of those rights. The Charter is an undertaking by the Government of Western Australia that the exercise of a democratic citizenship which recognises the differences in needs and priorities that exist between individuals and between communities will be achieved through its commitment to achieving substantive equality for all Western Australians.

In pursuing the goals of democratic citizenship the Government of Western Australia recognises the need to individualise service delivery if it is to guarantee equitable treatment for all. It recognises that universalist provision of services in the public sector may obscure the distinctive needs of minority communities and cultures. At the core of its policy of enabling Western Australians to practise a democratic citizenship, the State is committed to recognising the diversity present within its population, and to retain a respect for difference in the planning and delivery of services.

# PRINCIPLES

*Principle 1 Civic values enshrines the principles that guide both the Government and the public life of the citizenry in civil society. It is a set of civic beliefs rather than a set of cultural values that provide the glue that binds together members of a common political community.*

*Principle 2 Fairness refers to even-handedness in that differing needs have to be balanced carefully. It does not mean that individual needs are more or less important, but rather that each need should be given the appropriate weight according to their circumstances.*

*Principle 3 Equality focuses on the need for sensitivity to the differing needs of all people and that, in order for all to have the same opportunities, some people may need to be treated differently.*

*Principle 4 Participation refers to the abilities of groups and individuals to influence those decisions and structures that affect their lives and through which structural and other inequalities are dismantled.*

## **1 - Civic Values**

The equality of respect, mutual respect, individual freedom and dignity for all members of society subject to the acceptance of the rule of law, social, political and legal institutions and constitutional structures.

## **2 - Fairness**

The pursuit of public policies free of prejudice, discrimination and exclusion on the basis of characteristics such as origins, perceived 'race', culture, religion, ethnicity and nationality.

## **3 - Equality**

Equality of opportunity for all members of society to achieve their full potential in a free and democratic society where every individual is equal before, and under, the law.

## **4 - Participation**

The full and equitable participation in society of individuals and communities, irrespective of origins, culture, religion, ethnicity and nationality.

# OBJECTIVES

Pursuant to the above principles the objectives of the Government of Western Australia are to:

- Facilitate the inclusion and empowerment of members of all communities as full and equal members of the Australian community, enjoying the rights and duties of a shared citizenship.
- Encourage a sense of Australian identity and belonging as citizens, within a multicultural society.
- Ensure that all individuals and minority groups, recognising the unique status of Aboriginal peoples, receive equal and appropriate treatment and protection under the law.
- Enable the recognition and appreciation of the diverse cultures and backgrounds from which members of the Western Australian community are drawn.
- Remove all barriers to equal participation in, and enjoyment of, all aspects of society – social, political, cultural and economic.
- Foster the recognition of the achievements of, and contributions to, the Western Australian community of all individuals regardless of their origins, perceived 'race', culture, religion and nationality.



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