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Dear Ms Vamvakinou

Thank you for your letter of 10 February 2011 and the invitation to provide a submission to the inquiry into the contribution of migration to Australian society.

The Northern Territory takes a strong and positive stance on the influence of migration and multiculturalism. This position is embedded in government policy such as the Territory 2030 strategic plan. Two specific targets are included in the Territory 2030 plan as follows:

- Increase the number of Territorians from different backgrounds in leadership positions.
- All Territorians see cultural diversity as a positive influence in the community.

The Northern Territory has always been a multicultural location. We are a unique blend of the oldest living culture on earth and migrants who have chosen it as home. In the late 1800's, Darwin's non Indigenous population is reported as being as high as 80% Chinese heritage. It is this sort of backdrop which has contributed to the success story of multicultural cohesion which can be witnessed here.

People living in the Northern Territory were born in over 100 different countries, speaking many different languages and practising a variety of religions. According to the 2006 Australian Census, 23% of the Northern Territory's population spoke a language other than English at home.

There are around 100 multicultural associations in the Northern Territory, with many groups actively sharing their culture for the appreciation by and engagement with the wider community. These activities are supported by a significant grants program from the Northern Territory Government.

The Northern Territory has also been involved in national initiatives through partnerships with the Australian Government, such as the National Action Plan to Build on Social Cohesion, Harmony and Security. These cooperative initiatives ensure consistency in aim and approach in response to dealing with emerging issues including those influenced by global events.

All the above support mechanisms are also important to ensure that families and communities are strengthened to avoid marginalisation, isolation, and in extreme cases radicalisation. Therefore, the Northern Territory strongly supports the principles of social inclusion, fairness and respect which are encapsulated in the Australian Government's *The People of Australia – Australia's Multicultural Policy*.

The future of the Northern Territory is also tied to this multicultural framework. To meet the upcoming workforce demands and to enable the Northern Territory economy to meet its potential, it is inevitable that significant numbers of international migrants will be needed.

The Northern Territory continues to experience high labour force participation and low unemployment rates. Whilst the Northern Territory Government continues to invest in training and upskilling of the local workforce, skills and labour shortages continue. Northern Territory employers need to be able to access overseas workers with relevant skills and experience to enable businesses to deliver quality products and services to grow their businesses.

The predicted strong economic development and growth of the Northern Territory will be dependent on major projects, and skilled migration will play an important part in achieving this. As such, the size and flexibility of Australia's migration program will influence the ability of the Northern Territory to meet its workforce demands.

It is important to ensure that migration programs and visa schemes facilitate access to overseas workers who have the qualifications, skills and experience to meet the employers' needs. The Northern Territory Government's *Jobs NT* initiative identifies this need and aims to improve labour market performance and support economic and skills development for this purpose.

The Northern Territory continues to seek increased skilled overseas migration through strategies such as:

- the provision of information and advisory services to employers seeking to access skilled overseas workers;
- raising the profile of and stimulating interest in the Northern Territory as a place to live and work through participation in international migration expos in key source countries; and
- the attraction of overseas migrants to work and reside in the Northern Territory through participation in state specific and regional migration schemes.

In addition, the Northern Territory Government supports cooperation with the Department of Immigration and Citizenship on certain initiatives such as the simplified Labour Agreements to address needs in the resources sector.

Australia plays an important role in the resettlement of refugees and the Northern Territory looks forward to the long term benefits of an expanded population and the enrichment of our proudly multicultural society.

The Northern Territory Government provides support for humanitarian settlement in the areas of health, housing and education to settle and support their participation as Territorians.

The Northern Territory seeks to retain refugees settled here as long term Territorians. Considerations such as a person's originating country, suitability to the employment environment, family status and the strength of existing community groups are important to successful integration in our lifestyle as well as a longer term sustainable settlement program.

Several Northern Territory Government agencies participate in the Northern Territory Settlement Planning Committee. A number of our schools work closely with Melaleuca Refugee Centre in Darwin to provide additional support to strengthen the participation and integration of refugee students and their families into the broader community.

Migrant students in Northern Territory schools represent a range of backgrounds, from newly arrived students including humanitarian and refugee, asylum seeker and 457 visa sub-class students, through to those who may have been born in the Northern Territory but retain strong cultural and linguistic connections to their heritage culture.

The Department of Education and Training (DET)'s Multicultural Policy recognises the value of English as the common and shared language of Australia, and also the importance of valuing the cultural and linguistic heritage of all Australians. Our schools contribute to social inclusion through classroom and co-curricula multicultural activities, including Harmony Day which continues to be an important intercultural event for schools across the Northern Territory.

Five Intensive English Units (IEU) provide English language instruction and well-being programs for school-aged non-English speaking migrants. The units support these students, some of whom may have had little or interrupted formal education, to develop English language skills so they are able to move into mainstream classes, and/or move into employment, higher education or training.

Bilingual officers in IEU classrooms support language learning and promote liaison with families. In response to growing numbers of non-English speaking new-arrivals in the Northern Territory, a review of the IEUs was conducted recently. Outcomes of the review will help inform the ongoing delivery of education services for non-English speaking students.

Older migrant students are able to access training under the General Recurrent Program which funds Charles Darwin University and Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education to deliver up-skilling and re-skilling programs, as well as entry level training. This program provides an important school to training bridge for this group and opportunities to develop skills to contribute to Australia's long-term productivity capacity.

In addition, the Northern Territory Equity Training Grants scheme provides resources for increased training and employment opportunities for a range of groups including refugees.

Over many years the Northern Territory has been home to migrants from a diversity of countries. Whether from English speaking or non-English speaking backgrounds, migrant groups continue to contribute to the richness of our education and cultural life. The strengthening of migrant communities as productive members of our society should be a focus towards achieving social inclusion and shared economic benefits not just for the Northern Territory, but for Australia as well.

Yours sincerely

PAUL HENDERSON

12 MAY 2011