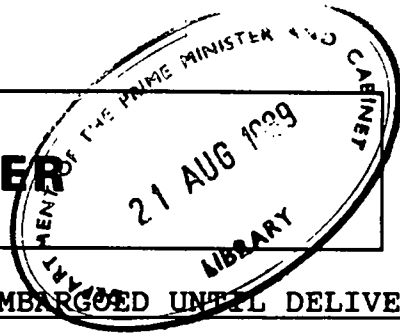




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PRIME MINISTER



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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
LAUNCH OF "DIVERSITY IS GREAT, MATE"
NORTH PERTH - 16 JULY 1989**

Premier Peter Dowding,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am delighted and genuinely proud to be here today, back in the city of my youth, to launch this publication on community relations in the inner-city area of Perth.

The booklet is the result of a project commissioned some eighteen months ago by my own Office of Multicultural Affairs and the Western Australian Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission.

It is the product of an exhaustive and probing examination of how a community of contemporary Australians learn, work and live together.

The North Perth project set out to examine how an ethnically and culturally diverse community worked in practice - how the people here live and relate to one another.

North Perth is a microcosm of multicultural Australia. It is an old centre born again with a new generation of residents. In the area covered by the survey, forty five per cent of the local population was born overseas - many of them have arrived in recent years from countries in Asia.

So North Perth offers much for us to learn about the Australia our children - these children - will inherit.

Will it be a nation divided by animosity and racial friction? Or will it be a diverse and rich community; stimulated, not frightened by its own variety; and united by a shared commitment to this great country and to all of the best things that distinguish Australians?

The answer is, I hope and believe, indicated in this report.

Over the last few years, the increasing diversity of Australia's population has been accompanied by increasing community debate about immigration. Some have claimed that the intake of immigrants, particularly from Asian countries, inevitably threatens Australia's social cohesion.

That is a view that bears no critical examination. The example we have of the inner-city area of Perth gives the lie to such claims. It proves, above all else, that it is not diversity itself that is divisive, but rather prejudice and intolerance.

What the researchers found, when they came here, was a community of people living in a peaceful and industrious manner - people who like the area and feel positive toward its diversity - people whose diversity is combined with respect and acceptance.

Here we have an example, repeated throughout Australia, of a truly multicultural community in which persons of differing ethnic, cultural and linguistic heritages are able to relate to each other on equal terms; in which one's position in society is not determined by one's birthplace or ethnic background; in which people are judged by what they say and do and not by what they look like; in which an Australian is not someone who conforms to a particular stereotype but whose commitment is to Australia.

Because that's what's important. It doesn't matter where you were born, or how long your family has been in Australia, or what is your colour, creed or race. What's important is your commitment to Australia.

What has distinguished so many of the people who have come to Australia to build a new life here is that quality of commitment. And what characterises the North Perth community depicted in this survey is, ultimately, the deepseated commitment of its people to Australia.

So these findings are both optimistic and challenging -

- Optimistic, because they are a clear indication that a harmonious multicultural society can be and is being achieved;
- Challenging, because they question the views of many who have expressed fears and concerns about the ethnic diversity and composition of our society.

Indeed, both the optimists and the pessimists should welcome this report. For the optimists it vindicates their faith. For the pessimists, it should alleviate their fears.

The multicultural policies of my Government have been developed and adopted as a key social policy in recognition of the unique diversity of ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious origins and identities of the Australian community.

They are policies which aim to ensure that all Australians, irrespective of background, have an equal opportunity to participate in the cultural and political life of the nation; to shape the decisions that affect them; to obtain their fair entitlement to Government services; and, within the law, to enjoy their own culture, practise their own religion and use their own language, as well as English.

Multiculturalism has three essential elements. First, we should support the right of individuals to maintain their cultural identity, within the constraints of Australian law. Multiculturalism promotes a climate of mutual acceptance in which diversity, not conformity, is seen as a virtue and a strength.

Second, we must recognise the social justice dimension of multiculturalism. Australians cannot have a fair go if they face barriers and prejudice against their colour, their command of English, their religion or ethnic background.

The third aspect of multiculturalism is integral to the economic future of Australia. Failure to remove inequities based on ethnic origin would mean a waste of human resources. At this time, more than ever, we must cultivate and utilise the skills and talents of all Australians, regardless of their background. In this fundamental sense all Australians, whether first generation or eighth, have a vested interest in the policy.

Multiculturalism is for all Australians and it requires, and deserves, the whole-hearted support of all of us as individuals because, in a very real sense, we all stand to gain from it.

It is in this context that I will be launching a package of measures, a National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia, on 26 July.

The National Agenda is an agenda for all Australia and for all Australians. It will serve to remind us of the significant contribution that immigrants have made to Australia, to our culture and to our economy. But it also highlights the fact that more needs to be done if we are fully to utilise the skills and knowledge of our migrant communities.

There is still prejudice and intolerance in sections of the Australian community. Indeed, the bus shelters, telephone booths and blank walls of this city are defaced each week with the posters of anger and hate.

I know that Premier Dowding and his Government are intent on eliminating this shameful face of Australia. Governments of all persuasions have a responsibility to show courage and leadership in the face of such cruel intolerance.

You can be assured that my Government will be making its contribution - in terms of a determined community relations campaign - when we launch the National Agenda 10 days from now.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am pleased I have come to North Perth today. It has given me renewed confidence that the Australia we will bequeath our children will be a place worth living in. It certainly will be if it is a place like North Perth.
