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Ethnic Affairs

Foreword

The Office is a small stand-alone unit with a Director reporting to the Chief Executive of the Department of Internal Affairs. The Office takes a population-based approach to its work and focuses on issues that apply across government. The Office acts as a point of contact with government for ethnic people and the community, and provides information about and for ethnic communities. It also provides referrals to appropriate service agencies.

The major issues facing ethnic people are acceptance of ethnic diversity; ensuring ethnic people have equal access to services to which they are entitled and promoting participation by ethnic people at all levels. The Office acts as a catalyst for change and does not provide services itself. Its policy work focuses on issues that require a coordinated or whole of government response.

The focus of the work of the Office will be to implement policies that help ethnic people to be seen, heard, included and accepted, and to create a climate where ethnic people are able to fully participate in and contribute to all aspects of New Zealand life.

This will require the government to promote a more responsive public service by implementing an ethnic perspectives framework, and further development of information and support services for ethnic people and their communities, such as the pilot interpreting services project. These activities will need to be supported by further work in promoting awareness, settlement and post settlement policy, and extending community outreach and support activities.

A priority will be the satisfactory conclusion of the reconciliation process with descendants of Chinese people who paid the Poll Tax.

This briefing is designed to give an overview of the ethnic affairs sector and the services and activities the Office provides.



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1. Sector Overview: Ethnic Affairs

Ethnic Affairs is a new portfolio established in 1999 to give ethnic communities a voice in government. The Office of Ethnic Affairs was formally launched in May 2001. The Office of Ethnic Affairs is a stand-alone unit within the Department of Internal Affairs reporting direct to the Chief Executive.

The purpose of the Office is "To create a climate so that ethnic people can fully participate in, and contribute to, all aspects of New Zealand life."

The Office works with and for people whose ethnic¹ heritage distinguishes them from the majority of other people in New Zealand. This definition includes that 10 percent of the population born in New Zealand who identify with their ethnic heritage, as well as immigrants and refugees. This does not include Māori and Pacific Island people who usually work through Te Puni Kokiri and the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs.

In 2001 Census:

- 356,000 New Zealanders recorded an "other" ethnicity (5% in 1996)
- this included 237,000 Asians (6.6%), 94,000 (2.7%) mainland Europeans and 24,000 (0.7%) Latin American and Africans
- most of the recent migration has been from Asia (now 6.6% of all Census respondents) and other non-English speaking areas
- largest populations were Chinese 100,000 and Indian 60,000
- 200 separate ethnic identities were recorded, of which 45 had a population of 2000 or more
- the balance has shifted from well-established communities to more recent arrivals (49% had arrived within the past 10 years and only 26% were NZ born)
- growth has been greatest in cities, with highest concentrations in Auckland, Hamilton and Wellington
- compared with "New Zealand European", other ethnic groups tend to have a greater proportion of people under 25 years of age, and a younger population overall
- employment: other ethnic people are twice as likely as Europeans to be unemployed
- language: 50,700 (2%) adults could not speak English at all and the Ministry of Education estimates that about 200,000 overseas-born adults speak English but have less than adequate levels of literacy in English.



¹ Ethnicity is a broad concept including race, language, religion, customs, traditions, as well as geographic, tribal or national identity.

2. Strategic And Legislative Framework: Ethnic Affairs

Over the next three years the Office will contribute to the major challenges of:

- empowering ethnic people to participate in all aspects of New Zealand life
- improving access by ethnic people to key services
- developing a better informed and more responsive public service
- raising awareness of ethnic diversity.

The Office of Ethnic Affairs has developed a strategic approach to incorporate ethnic perspectives in government policy and services, using these goals and an analysis of ethnic issues to develop a set of policy values and outcomes for ethnic people.

The Ethnic Affairs framework, "Ethnic Perspectives in Policy", has been launched as a strategic policy tool.

The strategy is based on:

- identifying ethnic groups likely to be affected by a policy or service
- applying a set of government endorsed high-level policy values and priority outcomes as a reference, to give direction to policy development
- fostering an aware and responsive public service. This will be the role of the Office, beginning first with key social service, policy and operational departments
- requiring ethnic perspectives to be considered in the preparation of policy, and consultation with the Office of Ethnic Affairs where policy is likely to have a significant impact on ethnic people
- improving the quality of information available to the public, by requiring information about ethnic people and the impact of policies and services to be published annually. Development of quality information and datasets by ethnicity is a critical issue.

New Zealand is party to several United Nations conventions that serve to eliminate discrimination and to protect the interests of minority ethnic groups and refugees, women and children.

Discrimination against ethnic groups based on nationality, religion, race or colour, ethnic or national origin is prohibited under the Bill of Rights Act and the Human Rights Act. The State Sector Act also promotes equal employment opportunities in the state sector.

Other agencies such as the Human Rights Commission, including the Race Relations Commissioner, have a role which links closely to that of the Office.



3. Minister's Role: Ethnic Affairs

The Minister for Ethnic Affairs' role is to give a voice and advocate in government for ethnic people. Ethnic Affairs has many issues in common with Ministries dealing with Māori and Pacific peoples. There are strong linkages with Ministerial portfolios such as Community and Voluntary, Education, Employment, Immigration, and Social Services.

4. Department's Role: Ethnic Affairs

The Office:

- provides advisory and information services
- offers ethnic people a point of contact with the New Zealand government
- provides ethnic people with advice and information on matters affecting them
- aims to educate all New Zealanders about ethnic communities and their contribution to our society
- provides policy advice and information on issues relating to ethnic groups, and identifies implications of government policy for ethnic communities.

5. Key Issues and Themes for next Three Years: Ethnic Affairs

Priority issues

Ethnic Perspectives in Policy

"Ethnic Perspectives in Policy" is a resource designed to help government agencies identify implications for ethnic communities in their work.

"Ethnic perspectives" requires Cabinet approval to give a clear mandate and signal the incoming government's desired direction for policy and services for ethnic people across the whole of government.

Interpreting Services

A pilot telephone interpreting service will begin in the first half of the next calendar year. The pilot will cover services provided by Immigration, New Zealand Police, Accident Compensation Corporation, Housing, Social Development and Internal Affairs. Funding has already been secured from these departments and the Migrant Levy to operate the pilot.

Chinese Community Reconciliation

The Office is in the midst of consultation with Chinese people and their descendants who paid the poll tax and suffered other discriminatory legislation. The consultation is to determine an appropriate form of reconciliation, if any, from the Government as a follow up to the formal apology made by the



Prime Minister in February of this year.

The next phase will include organising further community meetings, the closing of submissions, reviewing submissions and working on a package of proposals in partnership with representatives of the descendant community. The package will include proposals that other departments can meet from within existing baselines.

Medium Term Issues

Managing Diversity And Raising Awareness

The Office is developing strategies (including “Ethnic Perspectives”) to raise awareness within the public sector. When awareness is raised, the Office experiences a high demand for training and information about diversity and how to respond appropriately to different ethnic groups. It signals the need for the Office to develop a public education role.

Settlement Issues

Settlement issues have been a strong focus for the Office. The growth of a significant and diverse ethnic sector in New Zealand over the past decade has created public policy issues. Policies and programmes have arisen ad hoc in response to the experiences of earlier immigrants, rather than through consulting with ethnic communities to help anticipate emerging issues.

Post Settlement Issues

The Office has identified a range of potential post settlement issues surrounding refugees, who have a high degree of need for support beyond the initial assistance offered.

This post settlement work will need to be developed by the Office in conjunction with the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs and the Immigration Service. This will be a priority for the expanded policy capability of the Office.

Languages policy

There is a need to develop a more comprehensive language strategy covering interpreting, English as a second language and support to maintain ethnic community languages. This would require the involvement of a number of agencies.



6. Key Stakeholders: Ethnic Affairs

Key stakeholders include government agencies, local government, community organisations and ethnic people themselves:

- central Government - Immigration Service, the Police, the Human Rights Commission, the Ministries of Education, Health, Housing and Social Development, the Department of Labour and, within Internal Affairs, the Identity Services and Community Development groups
- local government
- community based organisations
- ethnic organisations - Federation of Ethnic Councils and the New Zealand Chinese Association.

