

Tuesday 30 October 2012

Vision for Citizenship in a Multicultural Victoria  
Victorian Multicultural Commission, [info@omac.vic.gov.au](mailto:info@omac.vic.gov.au)  
Level 3, 3 Treasury Place  
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002  
Telephone: 03 9651 0651

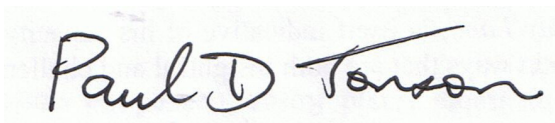
ATTENTION: Camilla MacDonell  
[camilla.macdonell@dpc.vic.gov.au](mailto:camilla.macdonell@dpc.vic.gov.au)

Dear Camilla,

The enclosed submission asserts that the formation of good citizenship greatly depends on what is offered through the education of our young people.

The signatories represent a wide circle of people of faith (27) and free thought (8) communities, and prominent academics (7) who believe that General Religions Education, including indigenous worldviews, secular philosophies and ethics, should be provided for all students.

Attached are a list of signatories, most of whom have signed in their own personal capacity, but some as formally representing their organizations (9). The references indicate the organizations to which they are attached. Time has not allowed consideration by other interested groups.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul D Tonson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent 'P' and 'T'.

Paul Tonson – Uniting Church; JCMA

Rod Bower – Rationalist Society of Australia

## **A SUBMISSION IN RESPONSE TO THE VISION FOR CITIZENSHIP IN A MULTICULTURAL VICTORIA**

This submission is offered by individuals and representatives from a broad coalition of faith and freethought groups in Melbourne, as listed at the end.

We believe that education in a wide range of religions and philosophies and ethical issues, within a secular [neutral] pedagogy, is an appropriate and essential form of Diversity Education for all citizens, and will contribute to the cohesive, peaceful and prosperous multicultural society that the government desires.

The signatories all support the inclusion, within secular education structures and curricula, of study units treating a wide range of religions and philosophies and ethical issues.

Our viewpoint is in line with the Principles of a Cohesive Multicultural Society that the government is committed to, as presented in the government's Vision statement, namely:

- ... universal education so that Victoria's young people are prepared to effectively participate in our multicultural and global society;
- building intercultural understanding and partnerships between communities.

Our submission focuses first on the role of education in the formation of citizens. We urge the Minister to ensure that links between OMAC and the Education department establish protocols that ensure the provision of the citizenship education as envisaged in the government's Vision for Citizenship in a Multicultural Victoria:

“A Whole-of-Government approach is critical to achieving the goal of unity in diversity.”

Our second focus is upon the resource that community members provide as volunteers towards education in citizenship according to the Vision statement:

“Valuing Diversity in Volunteering

This program recognises the important contribution that people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds make to strengthening Victorian communities through volunteering. It promotes volunteering to people from all backgrounds and promotes the value of recruiting volunteers from diverse backgrounds to organisations.”

The following three statements regarding education, religions and faith, taken from the government's Vision for Citizenship provide the basis for this submission. [Reference to 'philosophy' has been inserted to affirm the place of freethought, meaning non-religious, world views.]

“Victoria's approach to multiculturalism and citizenship is based on the following key principles:

that cultural, [philosophical], religious, racial and linguistic diversity should be recognised and valued;” ....

AND

“The legacy of migration also means that Victoria enjoys the benefits of a rich and diverse multicultural heritage, in language, [philosophy], religion, faith and culture.”

AND

“Migrants and new arrivals contribute to a socially cohesive, multicultural society by sharing their rich cultural traditions, languages, [philosophies], and religious heritage with the broader community.”

Our brief responses to questions proposed by OMAC are as follows:

- What do you see as the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in Victoria and how could all Victorians be encouraged to take up those rights and responsibilities?

**All have a right to learn about the range of beliefs and philosophies that belong to the variety of cultures among our citizens and the opportunity to adopt their own philosophy of life, whether it involves a faith stance or a freethought philosophy, unprejudiced by the teaching of any particular faith.**

- How can the Government improve access to services for our diverse communities?

**The government needs to integrate the work of OMAC and the Education Department to ensure that culture studies and General Religions Education, including Indigenous studies and freethought philosophies and ethics, is provided to all children under the newly developing curriculum.**

- How can the Government better harness the skills, abilities and experiences of our diverse communities for the benefit of all Victorians?
- ... support all Victorians to more fully participate in society?, AND
- ... encourage all Victorians to appreciate the benefits of our diverse society?

**The government needs to encourage teachers to make use of experienced community representatives of various cultures, faiths and philosophies as living resources. These representatives could assist teachers at all levels to develop and present information in the classroom.**

- What existing programs do you think are the most important in supporting and promoting diversity in Victoria? How can these and other programs be improved?

**Below are listed several established organizations that offer or participate in interfaith and ethics programs for schools, to promote and support mutual respect in diversity.**

**These groups have significant experience and strong support from the community and from education professionals. Several of the signatories attached belong to these groups.**

**Jewish Christian Muslim Association in Australia (JCMA)**

**Building Bridges**

**Faith Communities Council of Victoria**

**InterAction**

**Initiatives for Change**

**The Interfaith Centre of Melbourne**

**Humanist Society of Victoria**

#### **Organisations in support (9):**

Freethought Student Alliance per  
Jason Ball, President .

Humanist Society of Victoria per  
Stephen Stuart, President

InterAction per  
Freeman Trebilcock

Popular Education Network Australia, per  
James Tonson

Rationalist Society of Australia per  
Dr Meredith Doig President

Religions for Peace Australia per  
Prof. Des Cahill, Chair, Religions for Peace Australia

Jewish Community Council of Victoria per  
Nina Bassat, Helen Light

COMMON - Centre of Melbourne MultiFaith & Others Network per  
Jessie Kaur Singh

WOMENS INTERNATIONAL NETWORK FOUNDATION per  
Heather Abramson

## **Individuals in support in their private capacity.**

### **ACADEMICS (7)**

Prof. Des Cahill, Chair, Religions for Peace Australia  
Religions for Peace Australia

Prof. Joseph A. Camilleri  
Professor of International Relations, La Trobe University

Professor, The Reverend Gary D Bouma,  
UNESCO Chair in Interreligious and Intercultural Relations - Asia Pacific

Dr Anna Halafoff  
Research Fellow, Centre for Citizenship and Globalisation, Deakin University  
Co-coordinator, Religions, Ethics and Education Network of Australia (REENA).

Prof. Stan van Hooft  
Professor in Philosophy, Faculty of Arts and Education, Deakin University

Prof. Peter Sherlock  
Vice-Chancellor, MCD University of Divinity.

Dr David Zyngier  
Senior Lecturer in Curriculum & Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, Monash  
University

### **INTERFAITH ACTIVISTS (27)**

Sandy Kouroupidis  
Mornington Interfaith Network

Reverend Helen Summers  
Interfaith Minister, Founder and Director, The Interfaith Centre of Melbourne

Freeman Trebilcock  
InterAction

Jim Aylmer  
Member UCA, President Monash Interfaith Gathering

Nina Bassat, Helen Light  
Jewish Community Council of Victoria

Jessie Kaur Singh  
COMMON - Centre of Melbourne MultiFaith & Others Network

Heather Abramson  
WOMENS INTERNATIONAL NETWORK FOUNDATION

Dr Morna Sturrock AM  
CCJ Executive Committee, member of JCMA

Rev Dr Paul Tonson  
Uniting Church in Australia, chair of JCMA Schools' Committee

Dr. Keith Hallett  
JCMA School's Committee member

John Cohen  
JCMA School's Committee member

Tal Meretz,  
Federal Head of Education, Netzer Australia

Sherene Hassan  
JCMA School's Committee member, Public speaker for the Islamic Council of Victoria

John Russell,  
Member of COMMON

Rev Merrill Kitchen OAM  
Chair of the Board of WellSpring with oversight of Building Bridges.

Tim Kitchen  
Co-ordinator of Building Bridges

Ruth Sandy  
Central region co-ordinator, Building Bridges.

Alex Safran  
Building Bridges committee member

Rev. John Baldock  
Parish Priest, Saint John's Anglican Parish East Malvern

Rev Duncan Reid  
Priest-in-charge, St George's Anglican Church, Flemington.

David Ayliffe  
Anglican from Mt Evelyn

Revd Dr Ronald Noone  
Senior Chaplain, Melbourne Grammar School.

Rev. Swee-Ann Koh  
Uniting Church Synod –Multicultural Dept.

Dr Nicholas Coleman  
Head of Religious Education, Wesley College, Melbourne

Rev Peter Beale  
East Malvern Uniting Church

Rev. W. Neil Wilkinson  
Uniting Church in Australia

Rev Alex Adam  
Uniting Church in Australia

Rev. Dr Avril Hannah-Jones  
Romsey, Lancefield, Riddells Creek and Mount Macedon Uniting Churches

**FREETHOUGHT ADHERENTS (8)**

Stephen Stuart, President  
Humanist Society of Victoria

Harry Gardner  
Council of Australian Humanist Societies, Vic Association for Philosophy in  
Schools

Jason Ball, President .  
Freethought Student Alliance

James Tonson  
Popular Education Network Australia,

Dr Meredith Doig President  
Rationalist Society of Australia

Rod Bower  
Member, Rationalist Society of Australia

Ian James  
Post-Christian

Georgia Morrissey, LLB.  
Fairness in Religions in Schools