



RELIGION and SOCIAL COHESION IN AUSTRALIA: AN OVERVIEW of MULTIFAITH ACTIVITY  
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## **RELIGION and SOCIAL COHESION IN AUSTRALIA:**

### **AN OVERVIEW of MULTIFAITH ACTIVITY**

(Current knowledge 24<sup>th</sup> September 2018)

**Dr. Susan Ennis and Emeritus Professor Desmond Cahill, O.A.M.**

In 2017-18, as part of its continuing commitment to Australian's social and religious well-being, Religions for Peace Australia (RfP Australia) conducted an *Audit of Multifaith/Interfaith Groups and Institutions and their Activities across Australia: From the Grassroots to International Engagement* to examine what is occurring across the nation. **The purpose of this document is fourfold:**

- 1. to present the results of the RfP audit,**
- 2. to frame them within the parameters of social cohesion and a multicultural/multifaith Australia,**
- 3. to outline our current recommendation on how faith/worldviews interaction needs the actioning of new policies and structured programs and**
- 4. to call for a small two-day conference for Australians who are actively engaged in faith/worldviews and multicultural matters.**

Australia is often described as a secular society implying that the secularist worldview is official policy whereas in fact Australia is a civil society with a soft separation of religion and state. As Table One attests, the religious profile of Australia has changed very quickly over the past two decades with Australia paradoxically becoming more secular and more multi-faith with huge growth in the numbers of believers in faiths other than Christian. For example, within the past five years Muslims have overtaken Buddhism as Australia's largest non-Christian religion.

#### **Religions for Peace Australia**

Religions for Peace Australia was established in the early 1970s in Melbourne soon after the forming of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP), now known as Religions for Peace International, in 1970 by a group of mainly Asian and US religious leaders. It now has more than 90 national chapters across the world together with regional chapters, including the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace (ACRP), also known as Religions for Peace Asia of which Australia and New Zealand are members.

RfP Australia, which currently has branches or affiliates in nearly all States and Territories, is one of the 21 affiliated member nations with ACRP having its headquarters in Tokyo with Professor Din Syamsuddin (Indonesia) its moderator and Emeritus Professor Desmond Cahill (Australia) as deputy moderator. Religions for Peace Australia is the only Australia-wide, multifaith network that is linked both into Asia and internationally. In 2006 it was the major organization in winning the bid in bringing to Melbourne the Parliament of the World's Religions, the world's largest interfaith gathering. It was held in December 2009 with 6,500 participants.

### Religious Profile of Australia and Multiculturalism

Below is a profile of recent changes in Australia's religious profile. Of note, are the major increases from 1996-2016 in the numbers of Hindus, Christians (not defined) Muslims and Buddhists in Australia. In addition, there has been a major increase in those who claim no religion. These shifts were not evident when Australia's initial multicultural policies were being developed.

**Table One: Religious Profile of Australia: 1996, 2011 and 2016 Census Comparisons**

1996 Census			2016 Census Comparisons			
Religion	Number	%	Religion	Number	2011-2016 % increase	1996-2016 % increase
Catholic	4,797,365	26.92	No religion	6,933,708	+44.55	+136.90
Anglican	3,903,323	21.99	Catholic	5,291,834	-02.70	+10.30
No religion	2,927,134	16.49	Anglican	3,101,185	-15.73	-20.60
Not stated	1,550,980	8.73	Not stated	2,238,735	+21.69	+44.30
Unit'gChurch	1,334,915	7.52	Unit'g Church	870,183	-18.35	-34.80
Presbyterian & Reformed	672,660	3.79	Christian (not furtherdefined)	612,371	+30.00	+236.70
Eastern Orthodox	492,304	2.78	Islam	604,240	+59.80	+200.80
Baptist	295,176	1.66	Buddhism	563,674	+06.60	+182.10
Lutheran	249,996	1.41	Presbyterian & Reformed	526,689	-12.15	-21.70
Islam	200,886	1.13	Eastern Orthodox	502,801	+02.13	+02.10
Buddhism	199,830	1.13	Hinduism	440,300	+59.80	+555.10
Christian	181,897	1.02	Baptist	345,142	-02.09	+16.90
Pentecostal	164,048	0.92	Pentecostal	260,558	+09.49	+58.80
Jeh.Witnesses	83,411	0.47	Lutheranism	174,019	-30.39	-30.40
Judaism	79,800	0.45	Sikhism	125,901	n.a.	n.a.
SalvatArmy	74,136	0.42	Judaism	91,022	-06.49	+14.10
Church of Xt	71,308	0.40	Jeh.Witnesses	82,510	-03.65	-01.01
Hinduism	67,209	0.38	SecularBeliefs	39,180	n.a.	n.a.
Seventh Day Adventist	52,618	0.30	Seventh Day Adventist	62,945	-00.10	+19.60
Church LDS	42,168	0.24	Church LDS	61,639	+03.10	+46.20

In addition, since 9/11 issues relating to terrorism and faith/worldviews have taken centre stage, including, perhaps inevitably, their politicization by individuals and social, political and religious groups in Australia and beyond. Therefore, a social cohesion policy for the 21st century needs to engage with the various religious and secular humanist traditions and their leaders in articulating a *21st Century Australian Multiculturalism* – this implies a multiculturalism which brings engagement with matters surrounding faith/worldviews in a structured way under its policy and program umbrellas.

## **Results of the Audit**

This RfP Australia audit found that the multi/interfaith sector is managed by very small dedicated groups of volunteers, a handful of part-time paid workers (almost all appointed by religious bodies such as the Catholic Church and its dioceses, by local government councils, by one network (namely the Interfaith Network of City of Greater Dandenong) and an even smaller group of dedicated academics. This audit also found that faith/worldviews engagement was not included as a structured part of social cohesion policy by the Federal Minister of Home Affairs, the Australian Human Rights Commission, the State and Territory governments, nor the Federal Department of Social Services.

The audit has highlighted policy and program development of faith/worldviews from a government perspective is simply not occurring, even though religion is constantly in the news with the Royal Commission into Child Sexual Abuse and the focus on religiously inspired terrorism and this report articulates the need for action. This report therefore is framed around the following areas:

### **1. Australian religious groups involved in interfaith/multifaith: Brief overview**

### **2. Australian states and multifaith activity**

### **3. Multifaith networks and advisory boards**

### **4. Multifaith education in Australia**

### **5. National multifaith/multicultural organizations**

### **6. Who is promoting multifaith in Australia?**

### **7. Multifaith organizations and environmental issues**

### **8. Australian multifaith organizations: their links to Asia and beyond**

### **9. An analysis of recent Federal Government statements and reports**

### **10. Academics and research institutions involved in multifaith issues**

### **11. Chaplaincy and specialist spiritual care**

### **12. Relations with ‘the other’ – areas of tension**

### **13. Engagement with and resistance to faith/worldview policy**

### **14. Faith commitment and social cohesion**

### **15. CURRENT RECOMMENDATIONS**



But first an overview of the current involvement of Australian religious groups.

## 1. AUSTRALIAN RELIGIOUS GROUPS<sup>1</sup> INVOLVED IN INTERFAITH/ MULTIFAITH: BRIEF OVERVIEW IN 2017

This brief overview of the interfaith scene in Australia (for more detail see footnote two<sup>2</sup>) found that, prior to 9/11 there were various Ecumenical Christian organizations functioning in Australia whose origins varied though most dated back to the 1960s. The prime umbrella organization is the National Council of Churches of Australia (NCCA) engaged with intrafaith relations between the various mainstream Christian Churches of the Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant traditions in their continuing quest for Christian unity. The aim has been to overcome the tensions and traditions as the result of the schisms that occurred in the fifth, twelfth and sixteenth centuries. Equally importantly there has also been a functioning Council of Christians and Jews whose origins date back to the Second World War.

Since 9/11 the Anglican, Catholic, Uniting Church and Jewish groups in most states and some smaller religious groups have become more involved with multifaith relations. For example, the Jewish, Christian and Muslim Association (JCMA)<sup>3</sup> which started in Melbourne in 2003. The Australian Federation of Islamic Councils now has Islamic Councils in most States and Territories. There is also the Australian National Imams Council (ANIC) which appoints the Grand Mufti of Australia.<sup>4</sup>

The larger churches have agencies that work with other faiths in extending beyond ecumenical activities to embrace multifaith communities, particularly since 9/11. For example, the Catholic Church has the active Australian Catholic Council for Ecumenism and Inter-Religious Relations Commission<sup>5</sup> with approximately two paid workers. Pax Christi (part of a global Catholic peace movement) formed in the 1970 in Australia has been engaged with ecumenical and multifaith peace matters.<sup>6</sup> The Uniting Church of Australia also has an extensive section on its website related to *Relations with Other Faiths*<sup>7</sup> and a regular newsletter relating to this matter. Ms April Robinson from the Uniting Church<sup>8</sup> is employed by the Victorian Council of Churches to work on multifaith interreligious matters. The Anglican Church does not have a national body with responsibility for interfaith relations.

Individual volunteers from various religious groups engage with multifaith groups as individuals and/or as representatives of their religious community. There are Buddhists from the Federation of Australian

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<sup>1</sup> For more details see <http://religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au/key-statistics-for-australia/> and the 2016 Australian Census

[http://religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au/upload/Religion\\_Cultural\\_Diversity\\_Multifaith\\_Kit.pdf](http://religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au/upload/Religion_Cultural_Diversity_Multifaith_Kit.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed understanding of the history of multifaith relations in Australia three books are relevant.

1. Cahill, D. Bouma, G., Dellal, H. & Leahy, M. (2004) **Religion, Cultural Diversity and Safeguarding Australia**, (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Canberra) (<http://amf.net.au/entry/religion-cultural-diversity-and-safeguarding-australia>)
2. Jupp, J. (ed.) (2009) **The Encyclopedia of Religions in Australia**, 2009 (Cambridge University Press, U.K.) has a chapter dedicated to this matter.
3. Halafoff, A. (2013) **The Multifaith Movement: Global Risks and Cosmopolitan Solutions**, also presents a short history as well as giving other references.

<sup>3</sup> <http://jcma.org.au/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.anic.org.au/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.catholic.org.au/advisory-bodies/australian-catholic-council-for-ecumenism-and-inter-religious-relations>

<sup>6</sup> <https://paxchristi.org.au/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://assembly.uca.org.au/rof>

<sup>8</sup> <https://assembly.uca.org.au/rof/rof-news/itemlist/tag/April%20Robinson>

Buddhist Councils and/or its various State groups and Sikhs from various groups. The Sathya Sai Organization, a multifaith group founded in India, has been active in Australia since 1980.<sup>9</sup> Hindus have only recently formed national groups though cohesiveness remains a serious problem. Hindus currently have a lesser engagement with multifaith matters which is not surprising as they are mostly new arrivals in Australia.

Finally, some very small religious groups, particularly the Baha'i, Brahma Kumaris and Quakers, are actively engaged in multifaith leadership as peaceful interfaith relations is an important part of their religious community's theology.

## 2. AUSTRALIAN STATES AND MULTIFAITH ACTIVITY

This section contains a brief summary of what is happening in the multifaith area by State/Territory. However, it is necessary to have some background understanding about multifaith groups and their general activities.

Most multifaith organizations sponsor multireligious and spiritual celebrations or commemorative services, special awareness-raising events, academic forums and discussion groups, for example, on UN Interfaith Harmony Day, the International Day of Peace, Multicultural Harmony Day etc. Most have a committee which initiates, publicizes and then runs these activities. Visits to each group's website or Facebook page will show their aims, activities and so forth (please note events can be out of date as it is often difficult for stretched volunteer groups to keep their websites up-to-date). The website of RfP Australia ([www.religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au](http://www.religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au)) provides the best news source of multifaith matters. Most groups run on minimal funds, sometimes a \$1,000 or less. Some apply for money from their State Ministry of Multicultural Affairs for events while others self-fund or function on donations or annual subscriptions.

**New South Wales** (NSW) has some multifaith activity, which is mostly run by volunteers. Josie Lacey OAM has been a long-time champion of the NSW Women's Interfaith Network<sup>10</sup> and Religions for Peace NSW<sup>11</sup>. She has been appointed a life member of the Ethnic Communities Council of NSW which gives these networks a formal multicultural link. Another interfaith women's group is supported by the St George Council. Affinity, which is inspired by the philosophy of Fethullah Gulen, (see below in Victorian section) has also been involved in many events. There is also an NSW JCMA group and a more formal group of NSW Catholic bishops and rabbis.

**Victoria** (Vic) There have been several clear phases in activity in Victoria

### Pre September 11

There had several groups active in the interfaith area prior to 9/11 (see more details in *Constructing a Local Multifaith Network* - web booklet<sup>12</sup>).

One of the first was Religions for Peace (RfP) a group which started in the early 1970s in Victoria. Pax Christi Victoria was also involved since about that time. The Interfaith Centre of Melbourne (ICM)<sup>13</sup> was founded by Rev Helen Summers in the year 2000. These groups are still active, ICM being more involved with education and cultural matters with RfP Victoria conducting more research and sponsoring lectures and seminars. RfP has also been responsible for Special Religious Education (see a later section) in Victoria and has also initiated the RfP Australia Network, the only multifaith network in Australia (see later). Prior to 9/11 there were also several local government groups functioning. For

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<sup>9</sup> <http://saiaustralia.org.au>

<sup>10</sup> <http://religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au/2016/06/05/nsw-womens-interfaith-network-at-17/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au/tag/new-south-wales/>

<sup>12</sup> [http://religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au/upload/Religion\\_Cultural\\_Diversity\\_Multifaith\\_Kit.pdf](http://religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au/upload/Religion_Cultural_Diversity_Multifaith_Kit.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> <https://interfaithcentre.org.au/>

example, the Moreland Interfaith Gathering, the Interfaith Network of the City of Greater Dandenong established in 1989.

Finally, in 1997, Sir James Gobbo and the Australian Multicultural Foundation sponsored a high-level conference on religion and cultural diversity (see later section) in Melbourne

### **Government Funding Post September 11, 2000**

Dr Halafoff in her 2013 doctoral monograph presents Victoria as a multifaith case study. She states that after 9/11 the then Labor Victorian Government, in contrast to the then Liberal Federal Government, reaffirmed its commitment to multicultural issues and was supportive of multifaith activities via the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) and encouraged multi-actor partnerships to reduce radicalization and marginalization of the Muslim community. This commitment and minimal funding have meant Victoria has been the most active State in the multifaith area. Various commentators<sup>14</sup> and academic researchers feel this has greatly aided social cohesion in this State.

The VMC's Multifaith and Interfaith Grants Program of \$400k per year (out of its \$20-40 million budget) ran for approximately 8 years (2008-2015) assisted in creating a number of local interfaith networks.

A direct effect of this State Government funding has been the emergence of additional local interfaith networks operating at a local Government area level. There are currently around thirty-six local interfaith networks operating across local Government areas in Melbourne and regional Victoria (ie Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Shepparton)<sup>15</sup>.

### **Parliament of World Religions comes to Melbourne in 2009**

In 2006, a Melbourne delegation comprising of various groups and led by Professor Desmond Cahill (Religions for Peace Australia) successfully won the right to stage the Parliament of the World's Religions<sup>16</sup>. This Parliament is held every five years around the world, and it took place in Melbourne, December 3-9 in 2009. Almost six thousand people from over two hundred religious traditions and sub-traditions gathered from across the world. It was funded by the Federal and State Governments and other national and international groups and individuals.

### **Faith Communities Council of Victoria**

In 1995 Faith Communities Forum was formed in Victoria. Then in 2010, as a concrete follow-up to the Parliament of the World's Religions and the work of several religious groups, various committed individuals, academics and multifaith networks the Faith Communities Council of Victoria (FCCV)<sup>17</sup> officially became Victoria's umbrella multifaith body with Mr Murray Davies being its long-time chairperson.

FCCV's Mission and Approach is:

- *FCCV was created to contribute to the harmony of the Victorian community by promoting positive relations between people of different faiths, and greater public knowledge and understanding of the teachings, customs and practices of Victoria's diverse faith traditions.*

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<sup>14</sup> Halafoff (2013) <http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/gtrec/files/2012/08/perceptions-report.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> <http://faithvictoria.org.au/resources/links>

<sup>16</sup> <https://parliamentofreligions.org/content/parliament-worlds-religions-2009-0>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.faithvictoria.org.au/>

- *FCCV believes that relationships between people of different faiths must be grounded in respect and understanding, which support the uniqueness of each faith tradition and encourage co-operative action.*
- *FCCV supports the right of individuals in Victoria to practice their religion freely and with integrity provided they abide by the state's laws and do not incite religious hatred.*

Sandy Kouroupidis, the Multifaith Officer FCCV, holds a part-time government funded position supported by the Victorian Multicultural Commission from 2010-2016. In the last few years funding has been a struggle as Government priorities have shifted from interfaith to other matters. The Multifaith Officer's work includes maintaining an extensive website<sup>18</sup>, and database, sending out monthly newsletters, releasing peak-body multifaith statements, supporting Local Interfaith Networks and co-ordinating multifaith activity across the state.

The officer also coordinates the holding of an annual one-day conference, the Victorian Interfaith Networks Conference, which is for all interfaith/multifaith networks operating across the state of Victoria. The Conference has a different theme each year and takes place in various Local Government Areas across Victoria. The conference aims include helping to build the capacity and sustainability of existing multifaith/interfaith networks, bringing people up-to-date with current multifaith/interfaith matters and providing networking opportunities.

### **Multifaith workers and other groups**

Victoria currently has a number of part-time multifaith/interfaith workers who have been employed in their positions over a number of years. For example, Sandy Kouroupidis of the FCCV, Ginette Everest of the Jewish Christian Muslim Association of Australia<sup>19</sup>), Helen Heath at the City of Greater Dandenong<sup>20</sup>, Aziz Cooper at the City of Darebin, Laurence Gray at the City of Wyndham, David Schütz from Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne (Ecumenical and Interfaith Commission)<sup>21</sup>, April Kailahi from Uniting Church in Australia (Synod of Victoria and Tasmania)<sup>22</sup> and Nivy Balachandran of United Religions Initiative (see later).

Some of these workers have been instrumental in producing multifaith publications and resources, Monash Health, several south eastern Melbourne Councils, the Victorian Government and the Interfaith Network of the City of Greater Dandenong's produced *Promoting Faith and Equality: An interfaith collaboration on preventing family violence*<sup>23</sup> which is now being used as a resource in other parts of Australia.

From time to time, these employed people (together with dedicated volunteers) meet to discuss what they are currently doing, for the purpose of reducing duplication, improving co-ordination of functions and events across the state, sharing ideas, developments and challenges faced in interfaith and providing mutual support & collaboration. This group has not met in the last year or so.

In addition to the groups above, after 9/11 a prominent new Victorian group has been the Australia Intercultural Society which is the Victorian equivalent of Affinity in NSW. This group was initially very active but in the last few years has become less active in the State following the attacks on the Gulen movement in Turkey by President Erdogan. As well, the Gulen movement continues to partly

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.faithvictoria.org.au/>

<sup>19</sup> <http://jcma.org.au/>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.interfaithnetwork.org.au/>

<sup>21</sup> <http://melbournecatholic.org.au/Archive/Features/ecumenical-and-interfaith-commission>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.victas.uca.org.au/>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.interfaithnetwork.org.au/images/stories/family-violence-multifaith.pdf>.



fund a Chair in the Study of Islam and Muslim-Catholic Relations at the Australian Catholic University<sup>24</sup>. The chair is currently located in Canberra.

### **A History of Major Multifaith Events in the State**

It is relevant to note that in Victoria the FCCV, its 1995 forerunner, the Multifaith Advisory Group (see later) and local interfaith networks have individually or jointly organized a number of events. For example, the religious component of the Centenary of Federation in 2001, the faith component of the 9/11 memorial, organized a Tsunami memorial, an interfaith celebration of Palm Sunday, a Sacred Space at Commonwealth Games Village (in partnership with Victorian Police Chaplains), the religious component of the first and subsequent Black Saturday Memorials and so forth<sup>25</sup>

### **Future**

To conclude, there are several concerns within some of the leadership in multifaith Victoria. These are:

The first change is that in the last two to three years, Victoria Governments direction has been the VMC moving funds away from multifaith and interfaith networks and focusing on other issues such as LGBTI and domestic violence issues. Even the FCCV's officer position is still funded year to year and there have been moves since 2016 to reduce its hours.

The Victorian Government has made funding changes without research and little consultation. Such a move is concerning as it could that undermine Victoria's good work in reducing Islamophobia and attacks on Jews within the State. It appears the State Government is dependant on current adverse events rather than thought through policies in this important area of social cohesion.

Secondly, in 2017, some local government authorities have started reducing their support for interfaith/multifaith matters.

Thirdly, well-funded research findings have not been shared with Victorian Networks e.g. *Social Cohesion in Bendigo*, by La Trobe University and funded by VMC<sup>26</sup>. Another example is the \$500,000, 2018 research funds given to Monash University to investigate *Religious diversity in Australia: strategies to maintain social cohesion* of which little is so far known, although it is a very worthwhile initiative.

**Queensland (QLD)**, as Australia's third most populous State, again has some multifaith activity, some of it unique in global terms. There is a Forum for Christians, Muslims and Jews (slightly different to JCMA). Also, the North Brisbane Interfaith Network which was started by a Uniting Church minister in Brisbane in 2008<sup>27</sup> and Believing Women for a Culture of Peace originated in Brisbane in the latter part of 2003<sup>28</sup>. The Queensland Intercultural Society (Gulen movement)<sup>29</sup> has been active in holding an annual Iftar Dinner at Parliament for the past 10 years along with other events. Also, on the Gold Coast there is the Multifaith Action and Advisory Group and the Gold Coast Chai group (the latter is women only). In Toowoomba there is the Toowoomba Interfaith Group. In Caboolture, the Abbey Multifaith and Cultural Dialogue Centre will open in August 2018. The Queensland Police Service sponsors annual interfaith dinners in various cities around the state.

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<sup>24</sup> [http://www.acu.edu.au/about\\_acu/faculties,\\_institutes\\_and\\_centres/centres/inter-religious\\_dialogue/fethullah\\_gulen\\_chair](http://www.acu.edu.au/about_acu/faculties,_institutes_and_centres/centres/inter-religious_dialogue/fethullah_gulen_chair)

<sup>25</sup> Written correspondence from Murray Davies Chair of the FCCV

<sup>26</sup> <https://multicultural.vic.gov.au/images/2017/VMCSocialCohesionInBendigo.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> [www.interfaithinaction.org.au/](http://www.interfaithinaction.org.au/)

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.believingwomen.org.au/>

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.qis.org.au/>

By far the largest contributor to multifaith initiatives in Queensland is Griffith University which has a *Centre for Interfaith and Cultural Dialogue*<sup>30</sup> initiated in 2002 and now headed by Dr Brian Adams. This has been funded through donations from various individuals and faith communities, in particular the Pure Land Learning College Association,<sup>31</sup> a Buddhist organization whose Australian location is in Toowoomba. In 2017 the Queensland Faiths Community Council was formed with the help of many people, including Dr Brian Adams. This council is one of the only three in Australia.

**Western Australia (WA)** appears to have limited multifaith activity, yet there is one bright light. There have been one or two dedicated multifaith groups, but volunteering is hard to sustain over many years and so they are currently in abeyance. However, a branch of Jews, Christians and Muslims Association (JCMA) in Perth meets from time to time. In addition, one group of Anglicans assisted with the building of a Perth mosque.

In the past The United Nations Association of Western Australia conducted multifaith events annually, principally centred around UN Observances, such as UN World Peace Day in September, UN World Day of Women, etc. The Brahma Kumaris in Western Australia have also facilitated multifaith events but less more recently. The Office of Multicultural Interests (OMI) consults with key WA religious leaders to produce information sheets on culture and religion<sup>32</sup>. It is claimed there is a Multifaith Network in Western Australia, but this may be a non-formal network as there is no evidence of it by way of a website or Facebook page.

Finally, there is, however, Professor Samina Yasmeen, director of the *Centre for Muslim States and Societies* at the University of Western Australia<sup>33</sup>. Her quiet dedicated work in Australia and East Asia is a light in the west. Currently she is trying to establish a permanent branch of Religions for Peace in Perth.

**South Australia (SA)** has the volunteer Multifaith Association of South Australia<sup>34</sup> which started in 1988, long before 9/11, and is the main multifaith organization. It holds several events a year and links with United Religions Initiatives (URI)<sup>35</sup>, a grassroots multifaith organization, as well as being the South Australian affiliate for RfP Australia. There is an annual multifaith event in collaboration with the Order of Australia Association (SA Branch) in addition to multifaith seminars at the University of South Australia. The South Australia Council of Churches is also active in multifaith matters and SA Buddhists are reported to be currently engaged in multifaith activities.

**Tasmania (TAS)** The most active group in the State is Religions for Peace Tasmania Branch<sup>36</sup>, which has been operating in Hobart since 1999. The group has a very dedicated band of volunteers coordinated by Terry Sussmilch of the Brahma Kumaris. They conduct monthly activities, sometimes in collaboration with Aboriginal people and environmental groups, e.g. Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC). Recently there has been a focus on family violence, with a resource<sup>37</sup> launched in Tasmania by the Governor in 2017. They also email out a monthly newsletter. Since 2015 they have worked with UTAS and held many events at the UTAS Multifaith Centre. Since 2017 they

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<sup>30</sup> <https://www.griffith.edu.au/community/centre-interfaith-cultural-dialogue>

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.purelandcollege.org.au/>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.omi.wa.gov.au/StatsInfoGuides/Pages/CultureReligionInformation.aspx>.

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.cmss.uwa.edu.au/>

<sup>34</sup> <http://multifaithsa.org.au/>

<sup>35</sup> [http://www.uri.org/about\\_uri](http://www.uri.org/about_uri)

<sup>36</sup> <https://religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au/tag/tasmania-branch/>

<sup>37</sup> *Promoting Equality and Respect: an interfaith resource on preventing family violence* (file:///C:/Users/LIGHTH~1/AppData/Local/Temp/family-violence-challenge-family-violence-booklet-promoting-equality-and-respect.pdf)

have worked alongside the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia (FECCA see page 9) and the Multicultural Council of Tasmania (MCoT) of which they are a member.

There are several other initiatives in the state. The Baha'i community have run World Religion Day for many years and the early inspiration for forming the Religions for Peace Tas Branch came from a Baha'i lady and a Uniting Church Minister. The Uniting Church is interfaith friendly and is supported in activities such as Iftar Dinners with the Tasmanian Muslim Association by the interfaith Community Development Officer of the Victoria/Tasmania synod of UCA. Interfaith Minister, Rev Shari Landeg, has set up an Interfaith group in Launceston and managed the website <sup>38</sup>until ill health intervened about two years ago. She is hoping to return to her activities as her health improves. In 2015, the Ahmadiyya Muslims organised a Conference about the World's faiths and have attended other interfaith events. A new group, Sacred Conversations, has been organised since February 2018 and holds monthly meetings at the UTAS Multifaith Centre. It also has a blog

It is important to note that joint work between MCoT, FECCA and RfP helps mitigate two structural issues. Firstly, the current Tasmanian Liberal Government is the only government in Australia which does not have a parliamentary portfolio for Multicultural Affairs. In addition, Anglican and Catholic Tasmanian episcopal leadership is recognized in national multifaith circles as having little, if any, interest in the multifaith agenda.

**Australian Capital Territory (ACT)** The Canberra Interfaith Forum (CIF)<sup>39</sup> has been active since 1993 and is the primary multifaith group. Again, they have quite a number of volunteer-run activities with 12 different spiritual traditions represented. They too have a representative on the Canberra Multicultural Forum (i.e. local Ethnic Communities Council). Other groups involved in multifaith activities are the Blue Star (Gülen Movement) and the Baha'i which also run multifaith activities or join with the Canberra Interfaith Forum. There is also a Jewish Christian Dialogue group which meets from time to time.

In the **Northern Territory** although there is an active Ethnic Communities Council which hosted the FECCA conference in 2017, there are no multifaith groups and little linking with national multifaith bodies. The NT population of 230,000 is mostly Christian while seven per cent are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who hold traditional beliefs<sup>40</sup>. Currently, RfP Australia is trying to establish a link with this ECC so it can be linked into the multifaith network.

To conclude this section, Victoria has established its leadership in the multifaith area; however, there are current concerns about the immediate future of multifaith activity in the state as VMC funding for the FCC officer's position appears withdrawn and local government appears less committed to the multifaith agenda than previously.

### 3. MULTIFAITH NETWORKS AND ADVISORY BODIES

A few **multifaith youth networks** are functioning but not in all States or Territories.

There is *Interaction*<sup>41</sup> in Victoria which is associated with Religions for Peace Victoria but is currently in abeyance. There is also the Youth Multifaith Network which is run in conjunction with Victoria Police. A youth interfaith group in South Australia has been supported by the Brahma Kumaris and the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints. Interestingly in Queensland, Griffith University's

<sup>38</sup> <http://interfaithtasmania.blogspot.com.au/p/local-groups-and-meetings.html>

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.canberrainterfaith.org.au/about.html>

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/2f762f95845417aeca25706c00834efa/D82C7917C3363AC8CA2570EC00787E6D?opendocument>

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.interaction.org.au/>

Centre for Interfaith & Cultural Dialogue<sup>42</sup> has many young volunteers. In the early 2000s, the Victorian Multicultural Commission set up the Multifaith/Multicultural Youth Network, however a website check appears to show it is no longer functioning. There was also the SYN Multifaith Perspectives program which has fallen into abeyance<sup>43</sup>. In Sydney there are two youth groups Youth PoWR (Youth Power for World Religions) which is involved with the Columbans<sup>44</sup> (a Catholic religious missionary order founded in Ireland).

Also, in Western Australia, some young volunteers did establish such activities but are no longer engaged in them. Except for Griffith University, these networks are volunteer run. There seems to be an understandable pattern of multifaith groups starting up and, if there are not paid staff to keep new young people coming through, the group seems to peter out.

According to the RfP webmaster, there are many Muslim youth networks together with Sikh, Punjabi, Christian, Jewish and Hindu youth networks as well as student networks. Nearly all of these operate in an exclusivist manner, but sometimes they conduct tours of places of worship, or interfaith exchanges on an occasional basis.

As one possible strategy for managing social cohesion, a few State Governments have joined with their religious leaders in forming **Multifaith Advisory Boards/Groups** with the impetus coming from various faith organisations, multicultural representatives etc. The audit shows NSW and Victorian Governments have taken up this positive initiative, but their foundations are shaky. It should be noted that in Victoria there are two groups the FCCV and the Multifaith Advisory Group with some of the same members on each group. Some pointed out it was a duplication when MAG<sup>45</sup> the second group was formed in 2008. In 2017 the Queensland Government established a multifaith board with the impetus quietly coming from Dr Brian Adams, Director of the Griffith University's Centre for Interfaith and Cultural Dialogue and other multifaith advocates.

Even fewer States have **Multifaith Police Advisory Boards** where faith leaders meet with State Police, the only States being NSW and Victoria. However, it is reported that in Tasmania, the ACT (via the Multicultural Community Forum – the local ECC) and in Queensland there are informal police faith leader networks which are used from time to time. Victoria has been the leader in this, beginning with the VictPol Multifaith Council established in 2005 as part of a community policing strategy. The initiative has attracted international attention and has been extremely useful at times of crisis such as the foiled attack on Federation Square and St Paul's Cathedral in December 2016.

Some interviewed for this audit stated that it is important that these faith leaders and Government meetings are occurring regularly during the year and not just at times of crisis, as understandably the faith leaders can feel 'used'.

#### 4. MULTIFAITH EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

In 2010, Religions for Peace Victoria with Monash University initiated a meeting with religious education academics in Victoria and beyond. This meeting was to look at issues surrounding religious education in Australian primary and secondary schools, as the government at that time was proposing a National Curriculum. Religious affairs were to be included in the new national curriculum but unfortunately in 2014 the National Curriculum project ran into serious trouble because the

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<sup>42</sup> <https://www.griffith.edu.au/community/centre-interfaith-cultural-dialogue>

<sup>43</sup> <http://syn.org.au/history/>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.columban.org.au/our-work/interfaith-relations/>

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/projects-and-initiatives/multifaith-advisory-group>

Commonwealth Government felt that there needed to be more emphasis on the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

At the time there are some Special Religious Instruction (SRI)<sup>46</sup> classes taught by volunteers in Victoria and NSW. In Victoria some SRI classes were run by Buddhists, Baha'is, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Orthodox Christians; the curriculum taught has been oversighted by Religions for Peace Victoria Branch, and training sessions with imparting skills such as classroom management have been delivered to SRI instructors. There are also Jewish, Muslim and Christian SRI classes run by their respective religious communities in Victoria. These classes were conducted during class time in state schools but 2015 saw a change in government policy which means they can only be taught during lunch-time or after school. As a consequence, few SRI classes now exist.

There are also SRI classes or equivalent in Queensland and WA. The ethics classes in NSW do not have a religious component. They are run during SRI time as an alternative for parents who do not want their children to participate in religious classes<sup>47</sup>.

In recent years there has been much controversy and concern particularly about the need for more structured multifaith education in the Australian curriculum on the basis that it is a core element in developing global and Asian literacy.

Much of SRI's complex history can be found in Dr Anna Halafoff's 2013 book<sup>48</sup>. Issues and laws which date back to white settlement in Australia are presented, as they affect current matters. The book also gives an excellent background on why the above 2010 conference was held. The result of the 2010 conference was a network called Religions, Ethics and Education Network Australia (REENA) with younger academics, Dr Anna Halafoff and Dr Catherine Byrne<sup>49</sup> taking the lead. REENA then became a lobby group whose aim was to review what was happening to multifaith curriculum development in Australian schools.

Over a number of years REENA has worked with the Victorian Education Department and the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)<sup>50</sup> - the National Curriculum Advisory Committee to assist in embedding multifaith education into the National Curriculum. This is to ensure knowledge of world religions is embedded into the national curriculum and it was taught by trained teachers not volunteers. The philosophy behind this type of initiative is that multi-religious knowledge is part of global literacy.

Halafoff stated in her 2013 book that Australia is behind the UK and the USA in the inclusion of World Religious Education (RE) in the mainstream curriculum. The RE Council of the UK oversees funding and professional development of RE teachers in the UK. This is of its nature multifaith and based on plurality and tolerance of religious differences, different worldviews and caters for gnostic and humanitarian worldviews. Many faith bodies in the UK provide curriculum material to this body. Assessments of RE teaching are conducted on an annual basis.

Recent discussions at the National Executive of RfP Australia and the results of this audit show that Catholic and some independent schools have better multifaith education than Australian Government schools. For example, books from Wesley College (Melbourne), Melbourne Grammar Girls and a

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<sup>46</sup> <http://religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au/role-of-the-religious-instruction-secretariat/>

<sup>47</sup> <https://primaryethics.com.au/>

<sup>48</sup> See this reference and all her writings at <http://www.deakin.edu.au/about-deakin/people/anna-halafoff>

<sup>49</sup> See here background books and papers at <http://theconversation.com/profiles/cathy-byrne-10459>

<sup>50</sup> <http://www.acara.edu.au/>



Jewish School in Sydney show a well-informed program. In fact, recent comments suggest the Victorian Catholic Education Office has taken the lead nationally and in the Catholic international world as it is currently developing an extensive multifaith curriculum for its schools.

This does not mean that all private religious schools have informed education programs about people who hold a different faith or inter faith beliefs, personas labelled as *the other*. A religion's theology proscribes attitudes to *the other*. For example, in Melbourne a teacher currently at an Orthodox school was greatly concerned as structural intolerance to *the other* was clearly evident throughout the school.

One issue not mentioned in Dr Halafoff's 2013 book, is that a major reason for the understandable controversy in Victoria with SRI classes was the selection of the provider. ACCESS Ministries<sup>51</sup> a well-funded Christian 'Evangelical' wing of Protestantism which won the contract to administer and provide Christian (12 Protestant churches) SRI classes in the Victorian. In 2015 the Victorian government changed the conditions for SRI classes by allowing them to be held either before or after school or during lunch time rather than in class time as previously mentioned. According to some, this has virtually caused the cessation of SRI classes.

To conclude, as at 2017 only the Victorian Government schools have a curriculum for multifaith education but implementation has been extremely slow. However, this is only for the five major religions and secular humanism. The State has also yet to train teachers. Currently it is not clear what is happening in the National Curriculum, although it is clear to say that REENA, a volunteer group, has not been as active in recent times.

## 5. NATIONAL MULTIFAITH/MULTICULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS

The Federal Department of Social Services funded or partly funded three groups involved in multicultural and to an extent some multifaith matters Surprisingly, multifaith matters are not part of the mission statements of the two prominent national multicultural institutions yet they do interfaith/multifaith work. Below are the various groups:

### a. Australian Multicultural Advisory Council (AMAC)<sup>52</sup>

This was formed in 2011 after a round table on *Interfaith and social cohesion in Australia: looking to the future*. Individuals were appointed to this board by the responsible Federal Minister. The Australian Multicultural Council's subsequent June 2014 report<sup>53</sup> had three recommendations

- a) supporting interfaith networks,
- b) supporting interfaith education and
- c) national interfaith representation.

A recent report<sup>54</sup> states that this body is not giving leadership across Australia in general. This audit also shows that the AMAC has not been addressing the three objectives listed above. Recent discussion with the Australian Multicultural Foundation (AMF) CEO found that this board has not been functioning for some time.

In June 2018 Minister Tudge appointed an expanded body. Other than Dr Hass Dellal, sadly none of the new appointees are known to be deeply involved in multifaith matters

<sup>51</sup> See <https://www.accessministries.org.au/about>

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/programs-policy/a-multicultural-australia/australian-multicultural-council>

<sup>53</sup> see [http://religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au/download/amc\\_interfaith\\_report.pdf](http://religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au/download/amc_interfaith_report.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> See The Australian Senate's Final Report on "*Ways of protecting and strengthening Australia's multiculturalism and social inclusion*" (August 17, 2017).

**b. Federation of Ethnic Community Councils of Australia (FECCA)** which gives its aim as:

*At the heart of FECCA's work is .... multiculturalism, embodied in equitable policies and non-discriminatory practices for all Australians, regardless of their cultural, linguistic, ethnic, racial or religious backgrounds. Towards this end, FECCA strives to ensure that the needs and aspirations of various cohorts of Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse population are heard by policy and decision makers, as well as the broader public.*

FECCA has also formalised partnerships with other organisations that have mutual interests. These are:

- 1) *RECOGNISE* which is the people's movement to recognize Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Australian Constitution,
- 2) *'Racism Stops with Me'* campaigning which is a public campaign within the National Anti-Racism Strategy led by the Australian Human Rights Commission,
- 3) National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, which is recognizing and supporting Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as First Peoples of Australia and
- 4) Australian Partnership of Religious Organisations (APRO).

It should be noted that APRO is the only group of the four mentioned here which does not have a paid staff member.

Despite multifaith not being in its aims, FECCA does to a limited extent engage in multifaith matters. For example, below are some of its recommendations in the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Inquiry (January 2017) into the status of the human right to freedom of religion or belief<sup>55</sup>.

- The Parliament should consider amending the Racial Discrimination Act to provide for similar protections against discrimination upon religious grounds. Alternatively, the Parliament should consider enacting separate legislation to that effect.
- The Australian Government should take a more proactive role in providing accurate information to the public; in building open interfaith dialogue; and in promoting and facilitating events such as 'mosque open days'.

Yet what is absent in the FECCA submission is a call for more multifaith education. Nor does it call for multifaith training for service providers or formal systematic training for multifaith officers. However, it does engage with racism and calls for the law to change to give protection against discrimination upon religious grounds.

**c. Australian Multicultural Foundation (AMF)**

This organization was first proposed by the FECCA National Conference in 1981. Then in 1986 FECCA and the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs (1979-1986) jointly gave direction to the Foundation. In 1988 AMF was legally incorporated as an independent organisation. Its website<sup>56</sup> states its aims as:

*To cultivate in all Australians a strong commitment to Australia as one people drawn from many cultures and by so doing to advance its social and economic well-being; the promotion of an awareness among the people of Australia of the diversity of cultures within Australia and the contribution of people from all cultures to the development of Australia; and the spread of respect and understanding between all cultural groups through any appropriate means.*

<sup>55</sup> <http://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Inquiry-into-the-status-of-the-human-right-to-freedom-of-religion-or-belief-1.pdf>

<sup>56</sup> <http://amf.net.au/about/aims-and-objectives>

Again, multifaith engagement is not official in their policies yet AMF's website shows it is engaged in Muslim youth programs and cyber security work which assists social cohesion. Over its history led by its foundation chairman, Sir James Gobbo, and its executive director, Dr Hass Dellal, it has been at the forefront in recognizing the multifaith component of multicultural Australia and is widely appreciated.

AMF provided significant leadership in bringing the multifaith agenda into the mainstream multicultural agenda, especially with a large conference, the *Religion and Cultural Diversity Conference* in 1997<sup>57</sup>. The conference was attended by major figures led by the Archbishop of the Conference and Cardinal Arinze from the Vatican.

Currently it is engaged in media training for national Muslim leadership. The AMF has hosted and continues to host the Regional Interfaith Network across Asia when the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website grant ceased.

## 6. WHO IS PROMOTING MULTIFAITH IN AUSTRALIA?

There are several national groups which engage in multifaith/interfaith/worldview understandings.

### i) **Australian Partnership of Religious Organizations (APRO)**<sup>58</sup>

APRO is a volunteer peak multifaith body established in 2003, arising out of 9/11. It comprises representatives of major faith bodies as well as national-level multicultural community organizations. Its affairs are conducted by a council comprising representatives of the member organizations and individual members. Unpaid specialist advisers are also appointed from time to time. All decisions are made by consensus.

Member bodies include: National Council of Churches in Australia, Muslims Australia (Australian Federation of Islamic Councils), Executive Council of Australian Jewry, Australian Baha'i Community, Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils, Hindu Council of Australia, National Sikh Council of Australia, Australian Multicultural Foundation, Settlement Council of Australia, UNESCO Chair in inter-religious and inter-cultural relations, Asia-Pacific, World Conference of Religions for Peace (Australia) and the Australian Sangha Association (representing ordained Buddhists).

The aims of APRO taken from the FECCA website are to:

- promote and advocate for inter-faith harmony, and understanding and respect between the adherents of the various religions in Australia;
- combat religious prejudice and discrimination; and
- consider and address matters of mutual concern arising out of the shared values and interests of the various religions.

APRO engages in a limited range of activities for the purpose of advancing its aims, including, but not limited to, the following:

- the organization of conferences, seminars, education programs and other functions of a similar nature;
- preparing and distributing reports and documents, and issuing public statements on relevant issues including religious discrimination or prejudice when arising;
- mobilizing support and assistance for religious communities at risk; and
- providing advice and recommendations to government on matters of concern.

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.amf.net.au/entry/religion-and-cultural-diversity-conferences>

<sup>58</sup> <https://apro-interfaith.org/>

Again, such an important body is run wholly by dedicated volunteers with Dr Natalie Mobini being its unpaid secretary. This group meets from time to time and has a national gathering with the religious attendees paying their own airfares and accommodation. Because it has no funds, it is difficult to play the role that it ought to be playing.

## **ii. United Religions Initiative (URI)**

This group founded in 1995 in San Francisco has been operating in Australia since 2010. Nivy Balachandran has been paid two days a week to link with groups in Australia and in the Asia Pacific Region since 2014 but this funding has now ceased. According to its website URI's aims are:

*“WE UNITE: to bridge differences between people of all beliefs, to create community, and to solve local and global challenges”*

Currently, URI has some grassroots projects in Australia and beyond, for example, in South Australia

## **iii. Religions for Peace Australia**

The audit shows this is the most active group in Australia. It started in Melbourne in the early 1970s and now has branches and/or affiliates in nearly all Australian States and Territories. All members are volunteers and are of various religious backgrounds. The branches are RfP Tasmania, RfP Victoria and RfP New South Wales. These have been increasingly linking together since the Victorian group initiated and brought the Parliament of the World's Religions to Melbourne, Australia in 2009. In 2014, RfP Australia became affiliated with the Canberra Interfaith Forum and the Multifaith Association of South Australia. A year later RfP Australia commenced linking with Griffith University's Centre for Interfaith & Cultural Dialogue and in 2017 with the Centre for Muslim States and Societies at the University of Western Australia. Only the Northern Territory is not linked into this network (although there were some links, but this person moved to Qld)

RfP Australia aims are taken from its extensive website<sup>59</sup>.

*Religions for Peace Australia (RfP) is to work for interreligious peace and harmony and for social cohesion in Australia as well as upholding the universal values of authentic religion and spirituality. It is linked to the Asian Conference for Religions for Peace and RfP International is the largest interfaith group in the world.*

This Australian network has phone hook-ups three times a year, a joint event for UN Interfaith Harmony Week with the Federal Parliamentary Friends of Multiculturalism, at Parliament House Canberra, and a mid-year AGM meeting also held in Canberra.

Some of the activities of RfP Australia:

- In 2004 sponsored in association with the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs the research study, *Religion, Cultural Diversity and Safeguarding Australia*, and two companion volumes in *Islamic Australia and Constructing a Local Multifaith Network*.
- In 2006-2009, played a major role in the 2009 staging of the Parliament of the World's Religions
- In 2011, conducted a major research and consultation project on *Freedom of Religion and Belief in the 21st Century* for the Australian Human Rights Commission.
- Provided presentations and commentary on key statistics on Religions in Australia and the Census.
- In 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018 initiated and assisted Federal Parliamentary Friends Multiculturalism and Canberra Interfaith Forum in the running of the UN Interfaith Harmony Day lecture at Parliament House Canberra.

<sup>59</sup> <http://religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au/>

- In 2017 conducted this audit of multifaith activity across Australia.
- In 2017 trained Army Chaplaincy in multifaith matters.
- Representative on APRO and many State Multifaith Advisory Committees and State ECCs.
- A paper on Multifaith Chaplaincy in Victoria.
- Manages the Multifaith Education Web site ( <http://www.multifaitheducation.com.au/>)
- Collaborates with the Australian Multicultural Foundation in oversight and support for the Regional Interfaith Network website for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and handles enquiries directed to that network<sup>60</sup>

Rev Chris Parnell, the RfP Australia and Regional Interfaith Network webmaster is an invaluable person for inter/multifaith matters in Australia.

It should be noted that many of the reports listed above have been carried out by the Chair of RfP Australia, Emeritus Professor Desmond Cahill and others such as Emeritus Professor Gary Bouma and Dr Hass Dellal, people considered to be the founders and champions of multicultural and multifaith matters.

## 7. MULTIFAITH ORGANISATIONS AND ENVIROMENTAL ISSUES

There are three groups involved in environmental and associated issues

- i) **Faith Ecology Network**<sup>61</sup> began in 2003. The *Columban Centre for Peace Ecology and Justice*, previously part of the Columban Mission Institute and now by Australia Catholic University. Its web site states:

1. *FEN is an Australian hub for strengthening an interfaith dialogue between science and religion. We encourage action between different faith communities regarding ecological insights through holding events, producing publications and sharing information through our networks and on social media. Our network of people is currently representative of, but not limited to Aboriginal, Anglican, Bahá'í, Buddhist, Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Jewish, Hindu, Islamic, Quaker, and Uniting Church faith traditions*

- ii) **Greenfaith Australia**<sup>62</sup> is an organization that originated in the USA and according to its website its aims are

1. *GreenFaith's mission is to inspire, educate and mobilize people of diverse religious backgrounds for environmental leadership. Our work is based on beliefs shared by the world's great religions - we believe that protecting the earth is a religious value, and that environmental stewardship is a moral responsibility.*
2. *There are three core values that guide the work that we do, and define us as an organization: Spirit, Stewardship and Justice*

- iii) In 2013, GreenFaith Australia merged with Australia's Religious Response to Climate Change, to become a Victorian-based local chapter.

<sup>60</sup> <http://regionalinterfaith.org.au/>

<sup>61</sup> <http://www.faithecolology.net.au/>

<sup>62</sup> <http://www.greenfaith.org/>



**iv) Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC).**

i. Its web site states that it

*is a multi-faith, member-based organisation of people from around Australia who are committed to taking action on climate change. Our members represent a variety of religious traditions. We believe that as people dedicated to the common good, inspired by our beliefs and energized by our spirituality, people of all faiths can and should be at the forefront of creating a safe climate. While celebrating the uniqueness of our different traditions, we stand together in working for an ecologically and socially sustainable future*

This group is active across Australia and has had several campaigns to raise awareness and take personal and collective actions. URI and some RfP Australia groups and affiliates have links to it.

**8. AUSTRALIAN MULTIFAITH ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR LINKS TO ASIA AND BEYOND**

Several academics and individuals in the multifaith area meet with Asian and/or World religious leaders once or twice a year.

For the past 20 years RfP Australia has been sending representatives including young adults to the Asian Conference for Religions for Peace (ACRP) (also known as Religions for Peace Asia), ACRP executive meetings, regional conferences, youth conferences and RfP International.

As previously mentioned, ACRP represents 21 countries, and represents more than half of humanity with China and India as two of the member nations.<sup>63</sup> At each of these larger meetings RfP Australia has taken member/s of the Jewish faith, being mindful that most ACRP members have never met someone of that faith.

The importance of these meetings is both symbolic and practical. For example, at ACRP meetings or executive meetings, North Koreans meet as equals with other Asian religious leaders which includes South Koreans. Often social cohesion or counter terrorism issues are discussed.

RfP Australia has taken leadership roles in ACRP and RfP International. For example, Prof Desmond Cahill OAM, Chair of RfP Australia has acted as a mediator between Asian nations or differing groups. Also, in recent times, *Interaction* RfP Australia youth representatives (one was Nivy Balachandran now working for URI) have become leaders of the youth and quietly raised complex issues.

The China Committee on Religions for Peace (CCRP) has had formal links with RfP Australia for many years. Some of this engagement has been challenging particularly as the CCRP boycotted the World Parliament of Religions in Melbourne in 2009 as the Dalai Lama was attending. Since then there have been several meetings of the ACRP and the Chair of RfP Australia in China. In 2012 RfP Australia had planned a visit to China but as the delegation was not allowed to visit some Catholic (linked to Rome) Jewish and Muslim religious sites, leaders of RfP Australia executive decided against this visit. There is a possibility of a CCRP delegation coming to Australia relatively soon. It is difficult for CCRP to understand the RfP Australia are all volunteers as the CCRP group are paid government officials with funds to host visitors and to visit.

There are a few other Australian groups involved in interfaith matters. Currently Nivy Balachandran works part-time in both Australia and Asia for URI. In 2017 URI Australia took two members to attend a regional interfaith meeting in Pakistan. She previously had been an *Interaction* RfP Australia representative at ACRP or RfP International meetings.

Dr Brian Adams *Director of the Griffith University Centre for Interfaith & Cultural Dialogue* (an affiliate group of RfP Australia) has been a pioneer when he initiated the first ever G20 Interfaith

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<sup>63</sup> <http://rfpasia.org/>

meeting in Brisbane in 2014. His work in leading these unique G20 meetings continues<sup>64</sup> with the next meeting in Argentina in 2018. He also organized a Commonwealth Conference in Brisbane<sup>65</sup> to coincide with the 2018 Commonwealth Games on the Gold Coast.

To conclude, religion and religious leadership in the multifaith sphere is politically, economically and socially important particularly to our Asian neighbours. The liaison of Australia with Asian and international bodies is completely dependent on volunteers.

## 9. ANALYSIS OF RECENT FEDERAL GOVERNMENT STATEMENTS AND REPORTS

Two recent documents on multiculturalism will be examined briefly. The first is the 2017 statement by Prime Minister Turnbull's *Multicultural Australia: United, Strong, Successful Australia's multicultural statement* which states:

*“Regular inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue is critical to reduce the possibility of tensions within communities and to strengthen cohesion and harmony. Such dialogue helps to reduce prejudice, promote cross-cultural understanding, improve relations between different ethnic and religious groups, and enhance the sense of belonging and trust.*

*Regardless of cultural background, birthplace or religion, everyone in Australia or coming to Australia has a responsibility to engage with and seek to understand each other, and reject any form of racism or violent extremism”*

Regarding this statement, the inclusion of interfaith dialogue is much welcomed. However, it should be noted that the statement does not mention multifaith (see Appendix 1 for a definition) nor the issue of relations between atheists, humanists etc., and the interface between religious/spiritual worldviews which can be an area of tension in Australia and beyond. This has been seen in the 2017 Marriage Equality vote.

The second is the Senate's final report on Ways of protecting and strengthening Australia's multiculturalism and social inclusion (August 17, 2017). This paper fully supports this recommendation.

**Recommendation 13 5.58** *The committee recommends that the Australian Government consider establishing an independent and resourced body, such as a National Centre for multiculturalism and religious diversity, to provide strategic and coordinated research into the areas of multiculturalism and religious diversity.*<sup>66</sup>

This paper recommends not merely research and evaluation studies, but also actual action-based research, strategies, policies and programs that are needed in this area. Also, this paper suggests some additional wording to a few of the report's other recommendations.

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.g20interfaith.org/>

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.griffith.edu.au/community/centre-interfaith-cultural-dialogue/commonwealth-conference>

<sup>66</sup> [https://www.google.com.au/search?source=hp&ei=tUx6WuS-FsS00gSYzpigCw&q=report+on+Ways+of+protecting+and+strengthening+Australia%27s+multiculturalism+and+social+inclusion+%28August+17%2C+2017%29&oq=report+on+Ways+of+protecting+and+strengthening+Australia%27s+multiculturalism+and+social+inclusion+%28August+17%2C+2017%29&gs\\_l=psy-ab.12...2464.2464.0.3735.1.1.0.0.0.0.0.0....0...1c..64.psy-ab..1.0.0....0.yLTUcFEoNcc](https://www.google.com.au/search?source=hp&ei=tUx6WuS-FsS00gSYzpigCw&q=report+on+Ways+of+protecting+and+strengthening+Australia%27s+multiculturalism+and+social+inclusion+%28August+17%2C+2017%29&oq=report+on+Ways+of+protecting+and+strengthening+Australia%27s+multiculturalism+and+social+inclusion+%28August+17%2C+2017%29&gs_l=psy-ab.12...2464.2464.0.3735.1.1.0.0.0.0.0.0....0...1c..64.psy-ab..1.0.0....0.yLTUcFEoNcc)

**Recommendation 7 4.51 Suggested addition:** *Teachers and service providers need training on how to anticipate and then sensitively manage friction on faith/worldview matters.*

**Recommendation 8 4.53 Need to include:** *clashes between faith/worldviews*

**Recommendation 11 5.38 Needs to include:** *faith/worldviews policy as these matters affects social cohesion*<sup>67</sup>

## 10. ACADEMICS AND RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS INVOLVED IN MULTIFAITH ISSUES

Listed below (by State in order of population size) are the academics currently involved with multifaith matters.

**NSW** - There appears to be no one working on multifaith issues. However, they are dealing with related issues. **Professor Kevin Dunn**, Western Sydney University and **Professor Andrew Jakubowicz**, University of Technology Sydney are researching racism and Islamophobia issues.

**Victoria** - There have been two academic and practical champions of interfaith/multifaith/worldview matters who have been active for many decades. Their work has reached beyond Victoria to Australia, Asia and beyond. **Emeritus Professor Desmond Cahill** *Professor of Intercultural Studies* at RMIT University, Chair of RfP Australia, Deputy Moderator of the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace (aka Religions for Peace Asia). **Emeritus Professor Gary Bouma** *Professor of Sociology* at Monash, and UNESCO Chair in Interreligious and Intercultural Relations - Asia Pacific, Monash University. President, Australian Association for the Study of Religion.

In addition, there have been significant contributions from:

**Dr. Anna Halafoff**, a sociologist of religion and a *Senior Lecturer in Sociology* at Deakin University; **Professor Fethi Mansouri** *Director, Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation*, Deakin University who researches for example Islam, multiculturalism etc.; and **Professor Greg Barton**, *Chair in Global Islamic Politics* also at Deakin University.

Other institutions which have some links with multifaith matters:

- The National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies (NCEIS) <http://arts.unimelb.edu.au/nceis> at Melbourne University with **Professor Abdallah Saeed**
- Monash University Islamic Studies: <http://www.monash.edu/pubs/handbooks/aos/islamic-studies/>, for example, Dr Salih Yucel <https://www.isra.org.au/salih-yucel>
- Dialogue Australia Network, founded in 2000, <http://www.dialogueaustralasia.org/>
- Australia Catholic University has a range of multifaith interfaith events and programs, including **Associate Professor Salih Yucel** who holds the **Fethullah Gulen Chair in the Study of Islam and Muslim-Catholic Relations** at the Australian Catholic University. [http://www.acu.edu.au/staff/our\\_university/featured\\_stories/interfaith\\_dialogue\\_event\\_s](http://www.acu.edu.au/staff/our_university/featured_stories/interfaith_dialogue_event_s)

<sup>67</sup> See my website for a more detailed article-

<http://refugeespiritualityreligion.com/2017/11/17/responding-to-ways-of-protecting-and-strengthening-australias-multiculturalism-and-social-inclusion/>

Also, the Latrobe University Centre for Dialogue, founded by **Professor Joseph Camilleri** started in 2005 until the University defunded it in mid-2010s <sup>68</sup>.

**Queensland - Dr Brian Adams**, Director of the Griffith Universities Centre for Interfaith & Cultural Dialogue. He has great global leadership by initiating the G20 interfaith meetings across the world in association with the G20 meetings of the world's top political leaders as well as many initiatives in the State of Queensland.

**Western Australia - Professor Samina Yasmeen**, Centre for Muslim States and Societies at the University of Western Australia. She is known for her work in multifaith in WA, on Islamic issues in Australia and in Muslim States and communities in the Indian Ocean region.

**South Australia** - There appear to be no academic experts although the OASIS chaplains group at Flinders University is very active as seen in the book on multifaith tertiary chaplaincy<sup>69</sup> by Geoffrey Boyce.

**Tasmania - Professor Douglas Ezzy** is Professor of Sociology at University of Tasmania. He is the editor of *The Journal for the Academic Study of Religion*, and President (2015) of The Australian Association for the Study of Religion.

**Australian Capital Territory - Rev Professor Stephen Pickard**, Executive Director of the Australian Centre of Christianity and Culture, Charles Sturt University and an Anglican bishop.

**Northern Territory** - Academics appear involved in issues surrounding First Nations Spirituality and to date have not been as linked in with multifaith/worldview matters.

In the past few years, most of these academics have been involved with the volunteer group RfP Australia on their National Executive or have been linked with them, particularly through its Chairperson, Emeritus Professor Desmond Cahill.

Several pertinent comments about academics and multifaith are called for in relation to the tenuousness of this important social cohesion research area. This audit shows that in our largest State, NSW, there are no academics directly involved in multifaith matters and that Victoria has the leading academics. In the third largest State, QLD the Centre for Interfaith & Cultural Dialogue at Griffith University is very active, nationally and internationally. Apart from a few, most of the above academics are retired or near retirement.

Sadly, there appears to be few up and coming academics in the multifaith area and as the above academics retire, a font of multicultural/multifaith knowledge will go with them. These are important factors which can negative affect multifaith social cohesion in Australia. This audit shows few younger academics (possibly due to work pressure and perhaps generational issues) involve themselves with voluntary multifaith groups or multifaith policy groups and if they do engage, it is only for a short time. On the other hand, many young and mid-aged academics are involved in counterterrorism/Islam research and programs as this is an area which receives significant research funds.

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<sup>68</sup> <http://www.josephcamilleri.org/content/centre-dialogue-la-trobe-university>

<sup>69</sup> See <http://religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au/2012/12/10/an-improbable-feast/>

It should be noted the Australian Human Rights Commission created a new two day a week position at the end of 2017. Daniel Nellor was appointed as the Advisor to the Freedom of Religion Human Rights Scrutiny Team. Late last year RfP Australia and URI initiated a joint meeting with this new advisor<sup>70</sup>.

### **Interfaith Multifaith Academic and Training Initiatives**

In 2017, Trinity College Theological School Melbourne is offered two units relating to Interfaith Engagement. Prior to this there were some units offered at some theoretical colleges for example, in Melbourne. The two subjects were to help students learn to engage with people of different faiths. These were offered members of the public as audit units, or by enrolled students. The unit was coordinated by Rev Prof Mark Lindsay from Trinity College Theological School and Rabbi Fred Morgan. Some lectures were also given by Prof. Abdullah Saaed from Melbourne University.

The Uniting Church in Australia for several years conducted the Interfaith September event, offering interfaith resources for worship activities during the month of September.<sup>71</sup> They also conducted a summer school of interfaith engagement in NSW during January – February. This course could be taken either as a student or auditor. In the past, the Uniting Church in Australia, Victoria and Tasmania Synod, used to conduct a Student Interfaith Conference annually, from 2010 – 2014<sup>72</sup>

Pace e Bene Australia (a Catholic group) has conducted programs for inspiring young people to apply for a Nonviolent Interfaith Leadership Retreat for several years at the Edmund Rice Centre in Melbourne.<sup>73</sup> Another initiative is the Janssens Spirituality Centre for Interreligious and Cross-Cultural Relations sponsored by the Divine Word Missionaries, a Catholic religious order founded in Germany.

## **11. CHAPLAINCY AND SPECIALIST SPIRITUAL CARE**

Chaplaincy has been part of Australian history right from its European beginnings in 1788, and it is now expanding rapidly. Part of this expansion is the move from denominational to multifaith chaplaincy. In 2017, Religions for Peace in Victoria with a grant from the Victorian Multicultural Commission completed a study of chaplaincy and specialist spiritual care in Victoria to highlight this move. As one example, in 2017 the Australian Army conducted a series of seminars across Australia for its chaplains as they prepare to incorporate Buddhist monks, Muslim imams and Hindu priests into their ranks as the army becomes more culturally diverse to reflect the Australian population. The main forms of chaplaincy are:

1. **Military chaplaincy**, which incorporates army, naval and air force chaplaincy
2. **Health care chaplaincy** which incorporates hospital, hospice, mental health, aged and HIV/AIDS chaplaincy
3. **Education chaplaincy** which incorporates school and university chaplaincy, including to international students
4. **Criminal justice chaplaincy** which incorporates police, court and prison chaplaincy
5. **Emergency services chaplaincy** which incorporates fire, ambulance and disaster chaplaincy
6. **Industrial chaplaincy** which incorporates chaplaincy in factories and including airports and seaports
7. **Sports chaplaincy** to various sports such as cricket and football as well as for Olympic and Commonwealth Games
8. **Migrant and refugee chaplaincy** to migrant and refugee settler communities
9. **Youth chaplaincy**

<sup>70</sup> <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/rights-and-freedoms>

<sup>71</sup> <https://www.assembly.uca.org.au/interfaithseptember2016>

<sup>72</sup> [https://web.archive.org/web/20130430081240/http://blogs.victas.uca.org.au/unitingthroughfaith/?page\\_id=334](https://web.archive.org/web/20130430081240/http://blogs.victas.uca.org.au/unitingthroughfaith/?page_id=334)

<sup>73</sup> [www.paceebene.org.au/](http://www.paceebene.org.au/)



During the research conducted by Religions for Peace as mentioned above, it was clear that there are other forms of chaplaincy where there is a scarcity of information such as business chaplaincy and for specialist health and welfare groups such as HIV/AIDS survivors and the deaf.

Good practice chaplaincy occurs in professional contexts such as hospitals, schools and army barracks. In a study of Salvation Army chaplains and their managers and on the basis of the literature, the functions and activities of a chaplain were outlined in the following terms:

- Chaplains constitute a powerful reminder of the healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling power of religious faith when religious beliefs or practices are tightly interwoven with the cultural context
- Chaplains provide supportive spiritual care through empathetic listening, demonstrating an understanding of persons in distress
- Chaplains design and lead religious ceremonies of worship and ritual
- Chaplains educate staff teams and other stakeholders regarding the relationship of spiritual and religious issues
- Chaplains encourage and support research activities to assess the effectiveness of providing spiritual care
- Chaplains reach across faith group boundaries and do not proselytise and also protect clients from being confronted by other, unwelcome forms of spiritual intrusion
- Chaplains serve as members of multidisciplinary care teams
- Chaplains participate in ethical decision making across a full range of situations
- Chaplains act as mediators and reconcilers for those who need a voice (Carey & Rumbold 2015)

In identifying the emerging issues and challenges in the area of chaplaincy, it is clear that there is insufficient coherence across many, but not all, chaplaincy sectors as they operate in separate silos. It is estimated there may be more than 6-7,000 chaplains across Australia though there are definitional problems. But they are playing a key role in Australian society which can be framed within the construct of social care.

The incoherence brings up the issue of registration in order to assist the process of accreditation, initial and in-service training, maintenance of standards and codes of conduct. Registration of all religious functionaries came up in the study of Australia's changing religious profile in the aftermath of 9/11 and the Bali bombings (Cahill, Bouma, Dellal & Leahy 2004) and has also emerged during the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Different chaplaincy sectors are at various points on the path to full professionalization as they are also walking down the path to expanding beyond an ecumenical Christian chaplaincy to an interfaith model. The critical issue concerns education and training for the increasingly professionalized areas of chaplaincy and spiritual care/health. Our conclusion is that anyone aspiring to work in these areas is poorly served by Australia's leading religiously-oriented educational institutions. It would seem that major educational institutions need to grasp the nettle and offer appropriate education and training programs at various award levels. They must be based on the notion of chaplaincy as spiritual care that is non-judgemental, non-proselytising, multifaith in operation and inter-disciplinary teamwork in orientation. Appointment selection criteria in all chaplaincy sectors need to be developed based on the appropriate levels of chaplaincy knowledge, skills and attitudes that are empirically based. Systems need to be strengthened whereby such competencies and standards are established by chaplaincy councils.

In conclusion, the various chaplaincies currently are mutating to address the emergence of Australia's multifaith diversity. It is now timely not only for multifaith chaplaincy to be strengthened but also for it to be given the recognition of the role it plays within our national commitment to the social care of all Australians, including by government and universities, and to Australia's multicultural vision.

## 12. RELATIONS WITH ‘THE OTHER’ – AREAS OF TENSION

This section will examine three tensions regarding otherness with ‘the other’ meaning people of a different religion or interfaith group.

Firstly, policy makers and activist implementers in the multifaith area need to manage the fact that, in multifaith/worldview Australia, religious *plurality* is not a part of some religious groups’ meaning system, e.g. Evangelical Christians<sup>74</sup>, some Catholic groups and some Islamic groups<sup>75</sup>. As a consequence, such groups have various responses to multifaith engagement; they can be hostile, or do not see its relevance or they may see the space as a way of gaining souls through proselytizing. These *exclusivist* attitudes - *soft* or *hard* in approach<sup>76</sup>- are often due to their religious group’s prescribed theology or teachings on *the other* - meaning people of a different faith or interfaith or those of no faith or those who change their faith i.e. apostates. For example, for Evangelical Christians, one of their important religious tenets is to evangelize and try to convert *the other*<sup>77</sup>. Therefore, when such groups attempt to engage in or deliver programs such as ACCESS SRI education (or work with refugees) evangelism will be one of the main reasons they are engaging in this area.

The ANIC (Australian National Imams Council) is not engaged at the level of APRO. However, the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC) only represents Sunnis as the only representative group on APRO. This means that the Australian Shi’ites<sup>78</sup>, (an estimate is 20-30 per cent of all Muslims), the Alawi<sup>79</sup> (some Lebanese Muslims), Ahmadiyya Muslims<sup>80</sup> and those who follow the Fethullah Gulen movement<sup>81</sup> are not represented. Interestingly the Gulen Movement<sup>82</sup>, currently viewed as an enemy by the Turkish State has yearly high-profile Iftar dinners in several States often with State and Federal politicians or police and have been very active in multifaith activities which they staff and

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<sup>74</sup> Regarding attitudes of Christian and Muslim refugees to ‘the others’, two models are relevant. First, Nesbitt (*Interfaith pilgrims: Living truths and truthful living*.2003 London: Quaker Books) presents Race’s (Interfaith encounter: The twin tracks of theology and dialogue. 2001, London: SCM). three broad categories of Christians, with variations within such as: i) exclusivists, who believe that outside the church there is no salvation, ii) inclusivists, who believe that Christ is working in faiths other than Christianity, but it is salvation in Christian terms and, iii) pluralists, who affirm different faiths as valid. See my PhD for more details.  
<https://researchbank.rmit.edu.au/eserv/rmit:160265/Ennis.pdf>.

<sup>75</sup> Kung (*Hans Küng Islam: Past, present & future* (J. Bowden, Trans.).2007, Oxford: Oneworld) and Saeed (2006) provide some classifications of Muslims internationally. Saeed’s typology is the most accessible. See my PhD for more details.  
<https://researchbank.rmit.edu.au/eserv/rmit:160265/Ennis.pdf>

<sup>76</sup> See <https://researchbank.rmit.edu.au/eserv/rmit:160265/Ennis.pdf>

<sup>77</sup> Lochhead, (*The dialogical imperative: A Christian reflection on interfaith encounter*.1998, New York: Orbis Books) Gives a model of different mentalities or perspectives that affect interfaith dialogue [I add multifaith relations] with these being: the ideologies of isolation, hostility, competition or partnership. Lochhead contends that the most constructive perspective is the integrative, and it is not a search for agreement, but rather a search for understanding and sharing. Lochhead also warns that both theological and ideological dimensions of religious theology can justify social attitudes from liberalism to hostility.

<sup>78</sup> More details, see <https://researchbank.rmit.edu.au/eserv/rmit:160265/Ennis.pdf>

<sup>79</sup> For example, see <http://www.abc.net.au/sundaynews/stories/s3577030.htm>

<sup>80</sup> <http://www.ahmadiyya.org.au/>

<sup>81</sup> <https://fgulen.com/en/>

<sup>82</sup> [https://scholar.google.com.au/scholar?hl=en&as\\_sdt=0,5&qsp=1&q=fethullah+g%C3%BClen+movement+%22politics+in+turkey%22](https://scholar.google.com.au/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0,5&qsp=1&q=fethullah+g%C3%BClen+movement+%22politics+in+turkey%22)

generously fund<sup>83</sup>. Also, the Gulen group has different names in different States; Blue Star in ACT, Queensland Intercultural Societies, Australian Intercultural Society in Victoria and Affinity in NSW and Western Australia.

Thirdly, multifaith engagement can be a way of new spiritual/religious movements, new immigrant/refugee religions, or non-mainstream groups gaining legitimacy. On the other hand, politicians, the media, service providers, bureaucrats and even some multifaith leaders who have little knowledge of the new group or minimal religious literacy can promote such religious groups/cults without deeply knowing who they are or what is the effect of attending their often, well-funded events. For example, one group which operates in Australia is the well-funded Universal Peace Federation<sup>84</sup>. Feedback from multifaith leaders who have attended their events in Australia and Asia suggests they work with others to foster their own religious agenda.

Fourthly, it is noted with some regret that Turkish mosques (where the Imams are appointed by the Government of Turkey and receive their remuneration from that government) have declined from making their premises available for interfaith events (as they had previously done) and now, if requested to participate in an interfaith event, first ring the Turkish Consulate before giving an answer. To date, all requests for interfaith participation have been denied. However, it is noted that bus tours of places of worship are permitted to visit the Turkish Mosques.

Some ways of knowing whether a group engaged in the multifaith space is legitimate is to observe if such groups can work with others of different faiths in a shared but equal way. Also, can such groups observe a multifaith code of conduct<sup>85</sup> when engaging in the multifaith/worldview space? For example, the Australian Intercultural Society (the Gulen movement) appears to work very well with other non-Islamic groups in Victoria.

Australia has religious freedom. So, there is a freedom to not engage in the multifaith space. However, this can often be difficult when 28 per cent of Australians are born overseas, and almost 50 per cent of children have one parent born overseas.

For many of the newly arrived 28 percent for example PRC nationals or people from the Middle East Australia may be the first time they have mixed with people of different faith/world views. Some of the 28 percent may indeed have been persecuted because of their faith/world views in their home country. Therefore, newly arrived often need assistance with this transition. Yet the current settlement programs have minimal training for staff and no structured educational programs to assist with settlement in multifaith/secular Australia. In addition, there is little information about this important part of social cohesion in settlement information on the web<sup>86</sup> nor it appears in the citizenship information.

It must be stressed that Australians including religious exclusivists have to abide by Australian law and Human Rights laws such as bullying, discrimination etc.

### **13. ENGAGEMENT AND RESISTANCE TO FAITH/WORLDVIEW POLICY**

This section suggests policy makers, public officials and others, personal and ideological factors can restrict engagement with multifaith policy. Multifaith engagement can at times be uncomfortable, confronting and complex. For some multicultural policy makers, academics, public officials and others,

<sup>83</sup> See Chapter 8, Halofoff, A *'The Multifaith movement: Global Risks and Cosmopolitan Solutions'* Springer.com, 2013, for a detailed account of activities in Victoria

<sup>84</sup> <http://www.upf.org/>

<sup>85</sup> For example, see <http://religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au/code-of-conduct/> or other multifaith groups websites

<sup>86</sup> <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-services/settle-in-australia>

difficult childhood/adolescence experience with religious leaders or religions that were rigid, abusive, bullying or much worse as we have seen with the Royal Commission into Institutional Sexual Abuse can understandably push *emotive response-buttons*. *Buttons* often pushed aside, seen as irrelevant or superstitious and so often not fully examined in adulthood.

Academics, public officials and multicultural staff can often label those who engage in multifaith as ‘*religious to highly religious*’ and so distance themselves from discussions with such groups or individuals. Such staff and policy makers often do not make the distinction between exclusivists, inclusivists and pluralist religious persons<sup>87</sup>. All are often labeled as exclusivist. Yet many experienced multifaith academics and multifaith leaders are pluralist or *soft* inclusivists. Most acknowledge there are complex issues for example, religious bullying, abuse or manipulation, often the same issues the non-religious/secular individuals are concerned about.

By limiting such multifaith discussion and engagement some policy makers, academics etc. can become *secular exclusivists* in their attitude, either consciously or unconsciously. Yet Lochhead writing in the interfaith area (1998)<sup>88</sup> states:

*“a secular view of the world and its secular theology can be no less imperialist, no less isolationist, than the colonial view and its missionary theology that it replaces” (page. 11)*

Constitutionally there is no effective separation between Church and State in Australia, yet secular individuals often claim or believe there is. Professor John Warhurst (Australian National University)<sup>89</sup> an expert in religion and Australian politics states that:

*“unlike the United States of America, government support for faith-based activities is commonplace in our country [Australia]. There is no equivalent in Australia to the Johnson Amendment enforcing religious-State separation”*

Warhurst comments there is a ‘wall’ between Church and State in the USA, while in Australia, especially given educational developments since the 1960s, (i.e. Australian Government aid to private schools) Church and State are “arm-in-arm. Also, Australian churches have delivered welfare services for the State as they have been contracted for many areas of service delivery<sup>90</sup>. For example, the Federal Government has contracted out welfare and employment services, particularly since the late 1990s.

To conclude, in the 2016 Census, approximately, 64 per cent of people claimed a religion. However, it is unknown how many of the other 30 per cent who claimed no religion and the 9 percent who did not answer consider themselves spiritual. There are now more than 150 religions in Australia, therefore mixing between faith/worldviews is common place and so a vital part of Australia’s social cohesion. Geopolitical and social factors in Australia, Asia and the world mean Australia needs to have more structured policies and programs for the cohesive interaction between faith/worldview matters.

#### 14. FAITH COMMITMENT AND SOCIAL COHESION

<sup>87</sup> See Race, A. (2001). *Interfaith encounter: The twin tracks of theology and dialogue*. London: SCM.

<sup>88</sup> Lochhead, D. (1998). *The dialogical imperative: A Christian reflection on interfaith encounter*. New York: Orbis Books.

<sup>89</sup> <http://religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au/2017/03/20/government-leaders-and-faith-in-australian-politics/#more-3266>.

<sup>90</sup> <http://amf.net.au/entry/religion-cultural-diversity-and-safeguarding-australia>

This section recommends that faith/worldview interaction patterns requires new policies, programs and evaluations across Australia and that this responsibility come under a new section within the multicultural policy area. The reason for suggesting this is it appears achievable in the current policy environment. However, in the long term faith/world view matter spans across the Department of Education, Social Services and Multiculturalism and so some interdepartmental accommodation will need to occur.

It should be noted that by placing these matters within the multicultural policy area there is no wish for faith /world view matters to be marginalized as an ethnic problem or a problem of newer religious communities who arrive in Australia.

Historically, different migration waves and theological beliefs can mean some established religious groups and religious leaders are less open to *the other*. For example, it is known, (yet to date not fully researched) in experienced multifaith circles that

- Sydney- Anglican, Catholic and Muslim leadership does not encourage and can even discourages multifaith engagement whereas the Sydney Jewish community does.
- Melbourne- Anglican, Catholic, Uniting and Muslim leaderships are more open to multifaith matters as is generally speaking the Jewish community
- Tasmania- both the Anglicans and Catholics are also not open, but the Uniting Church is as is its pattern across Australia.

Hence social cohesion and faith/world view matters are not just for newly arrived individuals or religious communities

Returning to placing, at this stage, faith/world view matters in multicultural policy area there are several reasons for suggesting this:

- culture and religion are inevitably intertwined.
- issues of religious leadership, power and abuse are often better known and sometimes managed by various actors in a religious or cultural community. This can also include assistance from non-religious members and/or professional workers.
- faith/worldview policies, programs and evaluations will often dove-tail with multicultural policies and programs.
- to establish at this stage a separate faith/worldview body will mean 1) a duplication of expertise and 2) be costlier than expanding current or future planned multicultural body to take on this new agenda

Initially this new section will need a number of staff positions as it will need to initiate a range of policies, then set up programs or link with other Government departments for them to initiate policies and programs. Staffing over time could then reduce, but never to less than a few.

This report **strongly recommends** that faith/worldview interaction needs to be brought into the multicultural policy area **in early 2019** for the following reasons:

- some inter/multifaith networks which have run events, dialogues and discussions are beginning to raise structural issues i.e. the need for more multifaith education and/or chaplains in Government schools. The rare example of this is Spiritual Care Australia who has recently undertaken initiatives for standardization of qualifications for hospital chaplains and pastoral carers in hospitals and palliative care establishments. Attention should be paid to the qualifications required of school chaplains, many of which may meet the standards and training expected of healthcare chaplains

- Such issues need experts to examine them and develop and implement subsequent policies, programs and evaluations. In parts of Australia we are now moving to a second tier of development, a deeper engagement with structural issues.
- deeper faith/worldview policies and activities are vital for social cohesion of not just the Muslim community. Dealing with exclusivist Christians, secular exclusivists and other exclusivists or the hardline persuasion groups who are not accepting of the Australian reality of faith/ world views pluralism is and will be an issue for the foreseeable future in both Australia and beyond. Well-developed faith/worldview policies and programs could be considered soft counterterrorism.

Finally, and most importantly, some of the people and groups, who could be called the founders of multiculturalism, those who were already quietly present at 9/11 and rose to the need of assistance with multifaith engagement are now in their 70's and 80's. With the exit of this generation of academics, lobbyists and volunteers, goes a great fount of knowledge, expertise and networks. Hence, we need their expertise to assist with the establishment of this new section before they fully retire.

Consequently, this audit suggests that Australia's social cohesion needs permanent funding and new academics and a few more professional workers to shift into this faith/worldview space.

## **CURRENT RECOMMENDATIONS**

For reasons listed in the introduction, *21st Century Australian Multiculturalism* needs to bring matters surrounding faith/worldviews in a structured way under its policy and program umbrellas. It is no longer sufficient for our nation's faith/worldview social cohesion within Australia and beyond our borders to be managed by a handful of dedicated but aging volunteers, part-time paid workers and mostly retired or semi-retired academics.

This report articulates that for social cohesion the faith/worldviews interaction needs the actioning of new policies and structured programs.

### **i) ESTABLISH AND FUND FAITH/WORLDBVIEW SECTION WITHIN AN AGENCY**

This audit agrees with the suggestion of the Senate's 2017 report on *Ways of protecting and strengthening Australia's multiculturalism and social inclusion* which calls for a *National Centre for Multiculturalism and Religious Diversity* (NCMRD). It is important to note that the 2004 *Religion, Cultural Diversity and Safeguarding Australia*<sup>91</sup> report for the then Immigration Department, recommended that a similar centre was needed and urged for. However, this was not implemented by the Federal Government at that time.

It is suggested that an Australia-wide expert body be formed on faith/worldview matters to support and guide this new section and that this committee have representatives from FECCA, APRO, RfP Australia, URI, some established multifaith groups and the Attorney General's Counter Terrorism unit and other organizations. It is further recommended that representatives span from the grass roots to academic levels and that they be of different faiths and worldviews and that appointments be made for a maximum of 6 years.

It is recommended that until such an agency as NCMRD is formed that the Australian Multicultural Foundation employ 4-6 employees with full time status. Their tasks will encompass researcher, program

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<sup>91</sup> <http://amf.net.au/entry/religion-cultural-diversity-and-safeguarding-australia>

initiator, evaluator and educator. It is envisaged that in the first few years there will be a considerable amount of work. However, this should reduce as policy and structures are developed to bring multifaith/worldviews into the multicultural area and mainstream educational frameworks.

It is also recommended that funds from the counterterrorism area be marginally reduced. That these separate funds then be directed to developing faith/worldview policies, programs and evaluation within the three tiers of Australian Government as this will strengthen our social cohesion.

## ii) FAITH/WORLDVIEW POLICY, PROGRAM AND RESEARCH INITIATIVES

Again, it should be noted that a number of the recommendations below have already been suggested in the 2004 *Religion, Cultural Diversity and Safeguarding Australia* report with only some being implemented by the then Federal Government.

### i. Federal and State Education Policies and Programs

**School Education:** Encourage:

- a) The national curriculum to incorporate religious and worldview education in its framework, and this be incorporated in all State school curricula.
- b) Teachers at all levels be given more training and sufficient good quality classroom faith/worldview educational resources.

### ii. Federal Initiatives

**a. Signs and Symbols for a Multifaith Australia:** There needs to be public consultative study on *Signs and symbols in and for a multifaith Australia*. For example, (i) multifaith ceremonies at times of national celebrations and tragedy, and (ii) insignia for the armed forces and their chaplains.

**b. Opening Prayers and Statements for Each Parliamentary Day:** RfP Australia supports the suggestion made in the 2004<sup>92</sup> study on *Religion, Cultural Diversity and Safeguarding Australia* sponsored by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs:

*that the Our Father [in Federal Parliament] be replaced by a series of prayers and readings selected by each of the major faith communities on a rotational basis with, perhaps, the Our Father, in deference to the Christian heritage of the Australian nation, being recited to close each parliamentary day. This was received by religious leaders as a more preferred and worthwhile compromise. It is suggested that the rotation also include a reading chosen by rationalist or atheist organizations in deference to those whose worldview is not embedded in a theist or alternative religious framework. It is suggested that the rotational system include those faith groups which have at least 0.333 per cent of the total population – in 2001, this would have included 16 religious and humanist groups.*

**c. Modifications to the Racial Discrimination Act:** As suggested by the Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia (FECCA), the Australian Parliament should change the Racial Discrimination Act (RDA) to provide for similar protections against discrimination upon religious grounds based on a consultative process that also incorporates the findings of the Ruddock Review of religious freedom.

### iii. State Multicultural and Multifaith Policies

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<sup>92</sup> [http://amf.net.au/library/uploads/files/Religion\\_Cultural\\_Diversity\\_Main\\_Report.pdf](http://amf.net.au/library/uploads/files/Religion_Cultural_Diversity_Main_Report.pdf) see page 99

### **New Initiatives at the State Level**

- a) Tasmania be strongly encouraged to have a Minister responsible for the area of Multicultural Affairs.
- b) Each State and territory to be encouraged to have faith advisory councils.
- c) Discussion with relevant parties to be encouraged to stimulate multifaith activity in Western Australia.
- d) A small-scale review of the Australian Partnership of Religious Organizations (APRO) be conducted with a view to a set of recommendations as to the way forward
- e) Each State and Territory police force establish a multifaith advisory council using the 2005 model of Victoria Police.

## **iv. National Training Issues**

The establishing of accredited courses with sufficient funds and clearly defined standards for:

**Community Education:** The Community education sector needs to introduce training programs on how to manage complex interaction between people of differing worldviews. This could eventually be extended to workplace training on discrimination and racism.

**Chaplaincy Standards:** There needs to be set national accreditation standards for Chaplaincy in schools, disaster management, the armed forces, hospitals, immigration detention centers etc.

**Chaplaincy Education:** The university and TAFE sectors establish appropriate training programs to meet the need for chaplains in most sectors based on a national strategy plan.

**Education of Media Personnel:** Increased religious literacy of the media through structured on-going programs need to be developed with university programs in professional communication and other professional bodies.

**Education of Multifaith Workers:** Through structured university courses and on-going programs.

**Induction Programs for Newly Arrived Religious Leaders:** The Monash religious leaders' training course be reactivated and funded by the Immigration Department as a pilot program for all newly arriving immigrant religious leaders. This has additional importance considering the applicable recommendation in the December 2017 report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse<sup>93</sup>.

## **v. The Adult Migrant Education Program**

**Revamping of the AMEP Courses:** In light of changing circumstances in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Australia, the following initiatives be introduced:

- a) Australia's pre-embarkation and post-arrival programs for refugees be reviewed and modified in terms of how they assist refugees in adjusting to differing worldviews in Australia in the commitment to interreligious harmony and social cohesion. For example: pre-arrival information sessions; on-arrival settlement information sessions; Adult Migrant Education Program's (AMEP) designated curriculums.

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<sup>93</sup> <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/other-reports>



- b) AMEP and the Humanitarian Settlement area, need staff training in how to assist people with differing faith/worldviews settle into Australia.

#### vi. Research Needs

- a) **Australia-wide Audit:** An audit and evaluation of the interfaith activities across Australia and their interface with Australia's commitment to interreligious harmony and social cohesion.
- b) **Religious Exclusivism, Interreligious Harmony and Social Cohesion:** An Australian Research Council grant be made available to examine religious extremism and exclusivism across all religions etc., and the extent of both transnational links and links with extremist Australian political groups.

## CONCLUSION

Halafoff (2013) states that in the late 2000s, various researchers commented that multifaith activities were preaching to the converted, and not reaching the more isolated and not dealing with the *tough* multifaith issues. This remains partly true today although some *tough* issues are starting to be examined in Victoria. For example, multifaith and family violence issues<sup>94</sup> and the LGBTI<sup>95</sup> issues in 2016. It is pertinent both groups have highly experienced and dedicated paid part-time workers.

Since 9/11 multifaith/worldview issues have become a vital area of social cohesion in Australia, with our Asian neighbors and with some trading partners. Australia's dedicated multifaith networks and the few, mostly near retired academics have served our country extremely well. It should be noted that many of the recommendations suggested above were recommended by Professors Bouma and Cahill and Dr Hass Dellal in their 2004 *Religion, Cultural Diversity and Safeguarding Australia* report produced for the then Department of Immigration. Unfortunately, only a few recommendations were implemented. This lack of implementation means that Australia is now lagging behind comparable nations such as the UK<sup>96</sup> as they have more developed multifaith programs and policies, for example, in their primary and secondary schools.

Multifaith Australia has currently developed to a second phase where our social cohesion needs to address more complex structural issues mentioned in this working paper. Therefore, 21<sup>st</sup> Century social cohesion needs a *21st Century Multicultural Social Policy*, meaning a multiculturalism which brings engagement with matters surrounding faith/worldviews interactions under its care via new policies, more structured programs, trials and innovative evaluations. To do this, funds to counterterrorism need to be minimally reduced. These funds are then used for faith/worldview engagement to fund the development and maintenance of Australia's social cohesion within and beyond our borders.

Given that the last conference to discuss multifaith and multicultural matters was twenty years ago, **Religions for Peace calls for a small national two-day conference of selected volunteers, paid employees, academics, politicians (tripartite), policy makers and so forth who are actively**

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<sup>94</sup> <http://www.greaterdandenong.com/document/29265/interfaith-collaboration-on-preventing-family-violence>

<sup>95</sup> <http://www.faithvictoria.org.au/upcoming-events/event/960-2016-victorian-interfaith-networks-conference-faith-communities-council-of-victoria>

<sup>96</sup> See Halafoff, A. (2013) *The Multifaith Movement: Global Risks and Cosmopolitan Solutions*, footnote 10

**engaged in faith/worldviews and multicultural matters. It is suggested that this timely conference be held in 2018.**

The aim of the conference is to discuss matters mentioned in this report and raised by other interested persons. For example, this working paper's recommendation that the Australian Multicultural Foundation (AMF) structurally take faith/worldview policy and programs, so it becomes a new section of AMF work. That this be a permanent arrangement or until for example the *National Centre for Multiculturalism and Religious Diversity* as suggested in the Senate report 2017<sup>97</sup> or another such body is established.

RfP Australia cannot stress how imperative it is that such a conference implements a number of policies, programs, and evaluation procedures not just talk about the possibilities. Ultimately a healthy society needs healthy religion.

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## ACRONYMS

ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACRP	Asian Conference of Religions for Peace also Religions for Peace Asia
AFIC	Australian Federation of Islamic Councils
AMF	Australian Multicultural Foundation
AMAC	Australian Multicultural Advisory Council
AMEP	Adult Migrant Education Program
APRO	Australian Partnership of Religious Organisations
ARRCC	Australian Religious Response to Climate Change
CIF	Canberra Interfaith Forum
CCRP	China Committee on Religions for Peace
FCCV	Faith Communities Council of Victoria
FECCA	Federation of Ethnic Community Councils of Australia
JCMA	Jewish Christian and Muslim Association
ICM	Interfaith Centre of Melbourne

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<sup>97</sup>Senate's final report on *Ways of protecting and strengthening Australia's multiculturalism and social inclusion* (August 17, 2017).

LGA	Local Government Area
NCCA	National Council of Churches
RDA	Racial Discrimination Act
REENA	Religions, Ethics and Education Network Australia
RfPA	Religions for Peace Australia
RfPI	Religions for Peace International
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
URI	United Religious Initiatives
VMC	Victorian Multicultural Commission
WCRP	World Conference of Religions for Peace

## APPENDIX ONE

### Multifaith/Interfaith Definitions

From Helen Heath's Paper *Culture Identity, Religion, Language and Belonging*, Municipal Association of Victoria Conference 2016: *From Multiculturalism to Inclusion*, Wednesday 31 August, City of Greater Dandenong

***Interfaith** supposes an ongoing relationship or dialogue between people of different faiths and spiritual traditions" (Guidelines for Multifaith Gatherings – Victorian Council of Churches) It indicates a development in understanding and relationships between members. People are involved to understand another's faith tradition (and their experience of that faith tradition) to come to some common ground, through dialogue. Many who engage in interfaith dialogue find there's an unexpected benefit in that they find that their experience of their own faith tradition is deepened through the process.*

***Multifaith** is different. Multifaith does not necessarily suppose an ongoing relationship but is alongside or parallel – it is a gathering for a common purpose or event. It can often be a public event or gathering. Public multi faith Community Gatherings at times of distress and disaster like the tsunami in 2005, the Victorian bushfires in 2009, the earthquakes in Japan etc., have enabled the wider community to come together for a time of reflection and prayer. Facilitated and organized by people of different faiths and spiritual traditions who are engaged in interfaith conversation with each other, these gatherings have offered a space for people to express their sorrow and loss, to hear prayers and meditations from diverse faiths and spiritual traditions and to take time to reflect, meditate or pray in their own way. These efforts through interfaith practice and dialogue and the actions of a few has the potential to affect the perceptions and wellbeing of the wider community.*

