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**Yarra Ranges Council:**

- **Welcomes migrants, asylum seekers and refugees**
- **Values the diverse cultures that make up our many communities**
- **Promotes respect and social cohesion and rejects all forms of racism, vilification and discrimination.**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Council is proud to acknowledge the Wurundjeri as the first peoples of our shared land and their rich cultural heritage and deep spiritual connection to this Country for time beyond counting. To move forward as a healthy and connected community, we first need to look back into the past to understand and respect the history, culture and heritage that informs both who we are and where we have come from.

This Policy acknowledges that the history of Yarra Ranges includes many different cultural groups and that the number of residents from diverse cultural backgrounds continues to grow.

Council recognises the contribution of people from across the world, to building the social, economic and cultural mosaic of this place. They have brought their cultural heritage, faith and traditions and contributed expertise and energy that helped shape the communities we experience today.

Local government has a fundamental role in facilitating the inclusion and participation of all residents in community life. In partnership with community groups, service providers, residents and other government agencies, Council has an integral role in understanding, strengthening and celebrating cultural diversity to build inclusive communities.

This policy sets out Council's commitment that people from all cultural backgrounds are valued, included and have the freedom to express their cultural, linguistic and faith traditions without fear or discrimination. The policy supports the Council Plan strategic objective of *Connected and Healthy Communities* and provides a platform for people from all cultures to be acknowledged and respected when accessing Council services.

This Policy also acknowledges the challenges faced and contributions made by migrants and humanitarian arrivals settling in the Yarra Ranges. Council acknowledges the challenges inherent in the journeys of asylum seekers and refugees who are fleeing war and human rights violations and have experienced trauma and persecution and deserve to be treated with dignity and compassion.

While Council does not provide direct settlement services to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, it provides and manages a range of services and activities that assist and support them in the community. These include maternal and child health services, arts and cultural programs, facilitating investment opportunities and training and advice for business people, recreation services, libraries, youth and other family services. Council seeks to ensure its services are accessible for everyone in the community.

Council has a role facilitating partnerships and networks that provide services to residents from diverse cultural backgrounds. Council also funds grant projects and activities that support multicultural groups, and advocates for appropriate services that support the needs of refugee and asylum seeker communities. Innovative early childhood programming to support refugee communities settling in the Yarra Ranges aligns with Council's strategic intent and commitments.

## **2. SCOPE**

The Policy affirms that while Indigenous Australians share some of the lived experience of other minority groups, they hold distinct cultural rights as Australia's first peoples. This distinction and other relevant matters are expressed in Council's Reconciliation Policy and Reconciliation Framework for Action and are out of scope for this policy.

This Policy articulates Council's commitment to pursue equity of access to civil society and opportunities for positive social participation for all and has a particular focus on the emerging cultural communities within the Yarra Ranges. Council also takes a pro-active role in promoting active and healthy ageing and responding to the needs of established migrant communities as they age is acknowledged in this policy. Council will do this through an organisational approach to leadership, advocacy, policy, celebration, customer responsiveness, partnerships, cultural safety, communication and engagement.

Council's commitment to the Racism; It Stops with Me campaign will be furthered through this policy.

## **3. POLICY STATEMENT**

### **YARRA RANGES COUNCIL:**

- 3.1** Advocates for the elimination of all forms of racism and discrimination and rejects all forms of racial and religious vilification, violence, harassment and discrimination.
- 3.2** Recognises cultural, linguistic and religious diversity as an integral part of the history and identity of the Yarra Ranges.

- 3.3 Respects and promotes the expression of culture, language and religion free from vilification or discrimination.
- 3.4 Acknowledges that within multicultural communities, there are also potentially vulnerable groups who may be at risk of further disadvantage such as women, refugees, asylum seekers, older people, people who are Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Intersex Queer Plus (LGBTIQ +) and people with disabilities.
- 3.5 Promotes an inclusive community, in which people are enabled to participate fully in the social, sporting and recreational, cultural, economic and political opportunities of the municipality irrespective of race, gender, culture, language or religion.
- 3.6 Welcomes refugees, asylum seekers and other newly arrived migrants to the municipality with respect and compassion.
- 3.7 Provides opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers to actively participate and contribute in community life.
- 3.8 Recognises the critical role that capacity building and leadership initiatives have in increasing social capital among migrant, refugee and asylum seeker communities.
- 3.9 Provides opportunities to celebrate and acknowledge the current and future cultural and economic contributions that migrants, refugees and asylum seekers have made to the culture and economy of the Yarra Ranges.
- 3.10 Recognises and celebrates the inherent strengths and resilience of diverse cultural communities.
- 3.11 Ensures Council services are responsive to the specific needs and circumstances of community members from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- 3.12 Encourages and facilitates access to community services for residents from diverse cultural backgrounds.

## **4. DEFINITIONS**

### **Cultural Diversity**

Cultural diversity in the context of this policy refers to the existence and value of the number of distinctive current, emerging and future cultural or ethnic groups within Yarra Ranges and that cultural diversity is a continually evolving process.

### **Cultural Safety**

A culturally safe environment is one that is socially, emotionally, spiritually and physically safe for people; where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning together.

### **Racism; It Stops with Me Campaign**

The Racism; It Stops with Me campaign is a national initiative with numerous signatories including many from local government working together to take action against racism in all its forms.

### **Refugees and Asylum Seekers**

Council recognises the United Nations definition of an asylum seeker as an individual seeking international protection but whose claim has yet to be fully determined. They are known as asylum seekers while their refugee status is being determined.

### **Migrants**

People who move from one country to another in order to find work or better living conditions.

## **5. RELATED DOCUMENTS**

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The Australian Government Multicultural Access and Equity Policy: Respecting Diversity

The National Anti-Racism Partnership and Strategy

The Victorian Multicultural Act, 2011

The Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act, 2006

All of Us, Victorian Multi-Cultural Policy

Yarra Ranges Council's:

- Council Plan
- Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Council Reconciliation Policy
- Youth Strategic Action Plan
- Diversity and Inclusion Policy