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Dr Klaas Woldring is a retired A/Prof. of Southern Cross University who taught Political Science and Management courses at that and other universities for 30 years. He was born in the Netherlands and migrated to South Africa in 1959 and to Australia in 1964. Has taught mostly in Australia, but also in Zambia and several Asian countries; has designed and taught courses in multicultural studies at SCU for teacher education students in the 1980s. Woldring has published six books, most recently in 2013 and 2014 on the need for structural and system change in Australia. He regards multiculturalism as a major strength of Australian society that needs to be embedded more effectively in the political, corporate and cultural institutions of the society.

Are Australian Governance Systems and Policies in Tune with a Multicultural Society?

Australia has adopted various policies to promote multiculturalism since 1972, starting with the initiatives by the Whitlam Government. This paper will endeavour to illustrate that several government systems and cultural practices in Australia do not adequately assist in preserving and further promoting the multicultural society. This is a particularly important issue in that in various parts of the world multiculturalism has acquired a quite negative connotation, e.g. in several European countries. Also the harsh policies of both our major parties in respect of political and religious refugees arriving by boat are not in harmony with the values underpinning our multicultural society.

Governance systems that will be identified as being in need of reform are the electoral systems, the Australian Constitution, representation in our parliaments and executive levels of corporations. Multiculturalism has generally been an outstanding success in Australia presenting a positive model to the world. The recent crisis related to asylum seekers has raised questions about the sincerity of cultural tolerance. Government responses to radical Islam expressions and violence appear extreme and polarise the society. Without quite major reforms in governance systems and representation the conflicts and intolerance demonstrated could stimulate latent prejudices and endanger social cohesion in Australia.

