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Submission: Keeping the culture Strong.

This heading presupposes that Australia has an identifiable culture. As a migrant, I have a slightly different perspective to someone born in Australia. I have been here for thirty years and the culture has changed significantly in that time. It has become fractured into a series of sub cultures, each asserting influence over its members rather than subscribing to an Australian culture as a whole. Australia's culture grew from a rural and resources base. There was a pioneering sense to how Australians saw themselves. Increasingly cultural diversity has meant the pioneers are only part, (and a diminishing part) of the culture. I suggest "Making the Culture Strong" would be a more suitable heading than "keeping it strong". It is not strong and is becoming weaker by the year. Of course, culture is dynamic and changes with time. The strong immigration particularly from Asia brings new cultural values, some of them conflicting with the older values and ethics. This is neither good nor bad but should not be ignored. To pretend that the old values of mateship, egalitarianism, equal opportunity etc will somehow be absorbed by migrants is to ignore the lessons of history and to leave the future to chance. The British grafted part of their culture onto India through the Raj - much of it would be regarded by some Indians as being for the worse. Australia's culture grew from its pioneering past including the free convicts. It appears that many of the values and ethics that come with the various Asian nations are at odds with those old Australian values...egalitarianism, equal opportunity, ethics. They are not always held as being cornerstones of culture and so will change the underlying values of Australia over time. If this is to be accepted and valued, it should be managed and acknowledged. Will Australia adopt the very widespread concept of "face" with its very different set of cultural rules and expressions. It is fundamental to many cultures but has not been part of Australia. Australians have always valued "saying what you mean" "being as good as your word" etc. The concept of "face" does not accommodate such values. So where do we sit with the changing values of our diverse population. We are many cultures now and becoming less identifiably one culture. In its ability to diminish cause of conflict, that is a good thing. It can also cause conflict as well. So it has to be managed. Simple solutions such as SBS will not facilitate understanding, they contribute to, but cannot force acceptance. The need for some common symbols, values, goals and mores is a key to creating and maintaining a strong culture. Culture is a set of SHARED values. The strength of culture flows from the belief in it which is shared by all its citizens. So, in my submission, Australia needs a clearly enunciated set of values and rights expressed in a document that might be called a "Bill of Rights" or a "Code for Australia" but which incorporates the values and expectations of our citizens. A statement of who we are and what we wish to be.

#### ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

This very forum is a good way to engage the community but not all Australians have access to the Internet and more especially have limited ability to use it effectively. Pres Sarkozy is conducting forums throughout France with the

same goal as this discussion. It would be valuable to see how effective or otherwise the French experience is proving. Engaging the community is a multi level exercise from direct communication through local meetings to this website and discussion in the media. A key is to engage the community and not just the political leaders of sub cultures, all of whom will push their own particular agenda. Let us particularly think of the non-English speaking citizens - or at least those who do not have English as a first language. How can they be eloquent in expressing their views in a language that is not there own. Thinks of the mother caring for her child; can she express her love in a language other than her native tongue and feel she is expressing herself truly? I suggest not. so we need a mechanism that enables our ESL citizens to fully express their vies in their own words.

### POWERING THE YOUNG

Why the young? Why not all citizens. The obsession with the young disenfranchises the older citizens. They should be heard too and be empowered. The young will inherit what the old create and should participate in its creation but to suggest the shaping of the future should lie exclusively in he hand of the young is to ignore the lessons of history.

But let us honestly provide the young with an understanding of the issues. Let us educate them and acknowledge their views. Why do they not march in the streets any more? Why is their little public protest in our universities from students wanting to change the world? Is it because they are too focussed on surviving because they must work two jobs and study at the same time leaving no time to think, criticise and seek change? I suggest it is. The destruction of the students' communities through the withdrawal of the Student Union subscriptions was a far reaching blow to educational community. Call it something other then a Student Union to avoid the polarisation that the word union causes, but reinstate the community of education establishments that encourages the young to think independently and have time to do it. The greatest question of all is "What if it weren't so?" when eruditely asked.

We need our young people to ask that question freely and will education behind them. Empowering the young is best done through open access to education and giving them the space to use that education to challenge the status quo.