



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR SANDGATE

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MULTICULTURALISM

Mr NUTTALL (Sandgate—ALP) (11.40 a.m.): Multicultural Affairs Queensland is a major example of a genuine commitment by the Queensland Labor Government to tackle those espousing policies of division. Before the recent election in this State, we needed to demonstrate to the electorate that we were vehemently opposed to extremist views which would undermine a multicultural Queensland. In one way, my worst fears have been realised with the election of 11 One Nation members to this Parliament. After that result, most of us here today have well and truly received a wake-up call—a wake-up call that we have to work harder, get out into the community and sell Multicultural Affairs Queensland and its benefits to the economy and Australia.

Queensland's multicultural community is one of our State's greatest assets. On 26 August this year, the Business Council of Australia, the Australian Council of Trade Unions, the Australian Council of Social Service and Australian religious leaders joined together to deliver a message to the nation emphasising their shared interest in a tolerant and open Australian society. I take this opportunity to read the following short excerpt from that statement—

"In the post war period employers and employees continue to share an integral part of the vision for a new and stronger Australia. In one of the great acts of co-operation between them, their leading representatives combined with successive governments and community leaders to plan and support the massive immigration program of that period which has, beyond measure, strengthened our economy and enriched our society. Under the program, some five and a half million people from more than 140 countries have come here to make Australia their home. In addition, Australians opened their doors to more than half a million refugees and other arrivals under humanitarian programs. This aggregate of more than six million is almost equivalent to the total population of Australia at the end of the war in 1945. Today, something over four out of ten Australians are post-war immigrants or the children of such immigrants and half of them came from non-English speaking backgrounds.

We Australians should be proud of the way in which over time migrants have transformed, strengthened and enriched our nation economically, socially and culturally.

The statements, attitudes and policies of the One Nation Party, including their opposition to an enhanced national immigration program, simply do not recognise the demographic, social or economic realities of our nation. They threaten Australian jobs by undercutting the growth that flows from an open economy. They threaten both our internal cohesion and our international reputation. They should be decisively repudiated by all Australians.

We, the Business Council of Australia, the Australian Council of Trade Unions, the Australian Council of Social Service and religious leaders of Australia call on all Australians to recognise the risks involved in the current situation and invite each and every Australian to reaffirm their unequivocal commitment to a tolerant, open, generous hearted Australian society."

I need to reiterate that, although there are those who demean multiculturalism, the Queensland Labor Government is totally committed to new directions for a multicultural Queensland. If we are to

maximise our multicultural advantage, we have to build on our cultural diversity. As a Government, we will—

- provide leadership in encouraging and valuing a culturally diverse society and in promoting social tolerance;

- affirm multiculturalism as the best way to foster cultural diversity;

- promote cultural diversity as an economic and social benefit to the State; and

- develop a more responsive framework within which Queensland Government agencies can operate and deliver real outcomes to people from diverse cultural backgrounds in Queensland.

As I indicated through a media release on 23 July this year, I intend to visit different regional areas to ensure that multiculturalism is fostered not only in the south-east corner but throughout the whole State.

The Government is committed to a focus on trade, investment and small business development, a stronger organisational support and development role, and a strong Statewide presence. To this end, this Government wants all of Queensland to avail itself of the skills, experience, cultural diversity and Statewide networking that Multicultural Affairs Queensland brings.

To foster and support a dynamic Multicultural Affairs Queensland, my office will develop a responsive, inclusive and broader spectrum policy, a process and structure which recognises that economic, communication, cultural and social considerations need to be addressed in a whole-of-Government way. My office will reinforce and support strategic participation between individuals, Government and the community and stimulate an environment conducive to the management and expansion of a culturally diverse society.

I will be asking Government agencies to actively solicit submissions to inform the planning and development process in Queensland. To demonstrate my commitment to this strategy, I point out that over the next 12 months it is planned to upgrade and expand the role of Multicultural Affairs Queensland, which was previously the Office of Ethnic and Multicultural Affairs. This has already begun with the relocation of MAQ to the Brisbane CBD. In addition, we will implement the following initiatives—

- we will introduce a cultural diversity support scheme;

- we will develop options to improve access to legal and justice circles;

- we will develop and establish a multicultural register, which will be maintained by Multicultural Affairs Queensland; and

- we will develop acceptable protocols for multicultural services in this State.

Moreover, the specific issues and recommendations raised by the 1996 Queensland Ethnic Affairs Advisory Committee review will be fully considered to inform further policy development in this area.

To give honourable members a few examples of what is envisaged under Labor's initiative for multicultural Queensland, let me speak about the cultural diversity support program to encourage the maintenance, expansion and longevity of Queensland's cultural diversity. Grants may be approved for the following—

- infrastructure development;

- information technology and community assistance, which will incorporate media projects, arts and culture programs, especially those which lead to sustainable employment;

- approved social research projects; and

- to match existing Commonwealth funding for ethnic school services being open to all Queenslanders and teachers at these schools meeting the requirements for registration with the Board of Teacher Registration. Current in-kind infrastructure support provided by Education Queensland will be maintained.

We will also improve Queensland's translation and interpreter services and continue to develop and expand the Languages Other than English program in schools. It is our policy to ensure that public funds under the Government's cultural diversity support program are directed to a whole-of-State development approach to Multicultural Affairs Queensland. The Department of the Premier and Cabinet recently directed MAQ to seek comment on a draft Cabinet submission on multicultural affairs. This has been completed with the assistance of a number of key peak ethnic organisations that provided valuable input to the Cabinet submission.

I now turn to another important aspect of my responsibility in Multicultural Affairs. Given the multicultural diversity of Queensland, I intend to be especially proactive at community Cabinet meetings, including those in regional Queensland. I expect to meet with a number of delegations at each of the community representative meetings. My office is working closely with the Cabinet secretariat in this matter. At my office I have already met with a dozen or so ethnic community representatives. I

have also taken advice from a range of intermediaries, including the MAQ. They have provided me with considerable insight into functions that the Government can perform in multicultural affairs.

We have to deliver on our pre-election programs. Recently, we were congratulated on our commitment to develop and expand LOTE and to match existing Commonwealth funding for ethnic schools. I have been reminded that resources need to be delivered on the ground sooner rather than later, and to this end the Government, in this case through my colleague the Minister for Education, will deliver the programs in a timely manner.

I started out by saying that Multicultural Affairs Queensland is a significant commitment by the Government. I also indicated that there are forces working against cultural diversity and harmony. Rest assured that I will do all in my power to deliver on multiculturalism.
