



Speech by

GORDON NUTTALL

MEMBER FOR SANDGATE

Hansard 17 November 1998

MULTICULTURAL QUEENSLAND POLICY

Mr NUTTALL (Sandgate—ALP) (11.40 a.m.): I rise to inform the House that the Multicultural Queensland Policy is now reaching out across all of Queensland. Since July, I have met with many delegations from the multicultural community in relation to how the new policy can assist its members to access support from our Government agencies no matter where they live in this State. With meetings in Bundaberg, Cairns, Mount Isa, Springwood and Nambour having already taken place and with further meetings planned before Christmas in Townsville and Mackay, as well as a number in and around Brisbane, I am delivering on my promise to have a hands-on approach to multicultural affairs.

Recently, I was able to play a part in the first men's reconciliation dinner at the Greek Club at South Brisbane. I was pleased to represent the Premier and his Government on that special occasion. Comradeship, excellent keynote speakers and entertainment of the highest quality highlighted the evening. As a Government and as a community, we go out of our way to counter racial prejudice and to make welcome all people no matter where they are from. Our multicultural community, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people, has taught us much about racial tolerance.

Some of us, though, still have some way to go in this matter. In recent weeks my office was approached by a leading private school in Brisbane seeking accommodation for its teachers and staff. When informed that a migrant education association was also seeking a particular building, the caller from this school said, "What about us Anglo-Saxons getting a go?" A copy of the multicultural policy has been sent to the learned gentleman.

I now want to turn to the essence of my speech today. On 15 September, I said that the Government was 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 to see multiculturalism as giving businesses a definitive, competitive advantage by utilising the pool of skills, the market acumen and the business contacts that are available through Queensland's culturally diverse society.

In collaboration with the Honourable Minister for State Development and Minister for Trade and our respective departmental officers, I engaged Queensland's multicultural business community in developing a business development initiative. This is a strategic move under the Multicultural Queensland Policy. I have sought a coordinated approach to maximise the benefits which Queensland's multicultural skills base can provide to the economy.

At my request, officers from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet have already had discussions with the Department of State Development about holding a business development forum. The opportunity to hold such an event was endorsed on 30 September of this year by the interdepartmental working group established to progress issues arising from the July trade and tourism summit. I intend to leverage maximum value out of this forum for both the multicultural business community and the Queensland economy. It is proposed that a round table forum be held to—

1. develop strategies for utilising the knowledge and contacts of bilateral chambers of commerce and industry and multicultural business organisations to increase trade and investment to Queensland;
2. to discuss with representatives of the chambers how best to work together in attracting business and investment to Queensland; and

3. to develop more effective working relationships between multicultural organisations and the Queensland Government.

Representatives of bilateral chambers of commerce and industry, multicultural business and professional organisations will be invited to the forum and an informal networking lunch to facilitate the exchange of ideas and opinions. At this stage the forum will be held after the Asia-Pacific summit in March next year. It is anticipated that, as a result of the forum, closer working relationships will need to be established between the Export Development and Trade Division, the Office of Multicultural Affairs Queensland and the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

Under the New Directions Statement on economic and trade development, one of the new strategies of the Government is to promote the diversification of Queensland's economic structures by expanding our capability to produce greater economic value from our natural wealth in minerals, agriculture, ocean resources, the environment and intellectual capital. The multicultural business communities forum relates to promoting the diversification of Queensland's economic structure by expanding to produce greater economic value from our wealth of intellectual capital based on our multicultural community.

A recent research study conducted by Access Economics has demonstrated the economic benefits of skilled migration and has shown that businesses established by business migrants are exporting strongly, generating significant jobs for Australians and investing millions in our economy. The research has indicated that business migrant firms have a higher rate of exporting than their Australian counterparts, on average employ more staff than Australian businesses, have a higher turnover than Australian firms and are more likely to remain as viable businesses. In regard to fostering and supporting a dynamic multicultural Queensland, the Government has now launched the multicultural policy. This Government also outlined that the new responsibilities for Multicultural Affairs Queensland will include a focus on trade, investment and small business development as well as a stronger organisational support and strategic development role.

There are significant opportunities available to Queensland in terms of trade and investment via our multicultural community. Cultural diversity is of economic and social benefit to the State and it encourages an environment that supports and rewards participation in the cultural, social and economic opportunities that Queensland offers. Business and the community alike benefit from the skills, experience, cultural understanding and networks of contacts that people from multicultural communities bring. Immigration has brought to Queensland a range of occupational and business skills, international experience and trading connections. These multicultural skills are now a major business advantage for this State.

As employers recognise that multicultural skills can benefit their business through increased and more effective business activity, companies are increasingly utilising these skills to capture new business in export markets and target niche markets. For major international companies considering locating in the Asia-Pacific region, the availability of employees with foreign language skills and international experience is a major factor in choosing the ideal business location. Queensland needs to harness the multicultural knowledge that is to be found in the State and to proactively promote Queensland as an ideal location for the regional headquarters of these companies.

The myriad multicultural business organisations and bilateral chambers of commerce are a ready-made gateway to the world of international business. Linking the multicultural work force to Queensland businesses focused on international trade and using their networks to attract overseas business to Queensland is one of the strengths of these organisations and one which has not really been harnessed. The forum will provide the Queensland Government with the opportunity to affirm the importance of the multicultural business community and bilateral chambers of commerce in the role that they play in fostering trade and investment to Queensland and to achieve a better understanding of the multicultural professional and business perspectives on trade and investment development in Australia.

As one of the coordinated initiatives arising from the trade and tourism summit in July and aiming to position Queensland positively in Asia, this initiative will be the first step towards harnessing the opportunities available for increasing trade and investment in Queensland through the multicultural business organisations and bilateral chambers of commerce and industry. It also demonstrates to key participants in the trade and tourism summit that the Government has taken notice of the major issues raised and is proactively working on them for the benefit of all Queenslanders.
