



Speech by

Mr D. BRISKEY

MEMBER FOR CLEVELAND

Hansard 7 August 2002

VIETNAMESE COMMUNITY; COMMENTS BY MR G. HARDGRAVE

Mr BRISKEY (Cleveland—ALP) (12.15 a.m.): I want to put on record my disgust at the federal Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs Minister's slur on the Vietnamese community, as reported by the *Courier-Mail* on 15 July 2002. The page 1 lead article had Mr Hardgrave setting a very dangerous precedent in linking ethnicity to criminality amid claims that crime is caused by migrant children being able to speak English better than their parents. Mr Hardgrave, whose Moreton electorate is one of the more culturally and linguistically diverse in Queensland, claimed that crime was spiralling out of control due to a language barrier between Vietnamese parents and their children. The absurd assumption upon which the minister makes his claim is that in many Vietnamese households parents do not practise their English and the children do not practise their Vietnamese. The minister's claims are nothing short of outrageous.

As shadow Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, Laurie Ferguson, commented to the media the following day—

The Minister would like us to believe that the only way these families can communicate is with the assistance of an interpreter.

The federal minister's comments are not only offensive to the Vietnamese community but statistically unsustainable. Research suggests that in households where parents do not have adequate English language skills, children are usually bilingual.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics Social Trends Data 1999 report shows that more than half—56 per cent—of children whose parents were born overseas speak a language other than English at home. What is more, the federal government's second generation Australians, personally launched by Mr Hardgrave himself on 23 May this year, says—

Compared to other second generation (Migrants), the second generation of Slav-Macedonian, Turkish or Vietnamese origin were the most likely to retain the use of their parents' native language at home.

So Mr Hardgrave's own report identifies the Vietnamese second generation as one of the top three groups most likely to speak their parents' language at home. To suggest that a language barrier has caused an upsurge in criminal activity within this particular ethnic community is a very long and inappropriate bow for the minister to be drawing, particularly given his portfolio area. And as for a language-related crime epidemic—where is the evidence? The minister's comments are flawed, unsubstantiated and completely inappropriate. They seek to divide a community which has contributed to, and continues to contribute to, the success of Australia. I suggest that if the minister does generally believe a language barrier exists in communities he should put forward constructive solutions like extending the access to English classes, particularly for temporary protection visa holders.

While the federal government continues to deprive temporary protection visa holders of basic settlement services, the Queensland government continues to give TPV holders the same access to government services, including English lessons, as permanent protection visa holders. Queenslanders value the enormous contribution migrants and refugees make to our state, and this government works continually to promote harmonious community relations where diversity is valued and accepted.
