



Speech by

Mr D. BRISKEY

MEMBER FOR CLEVELAND

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CENTRE FOR MULTICULTURAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Mr BRISKEY (Cleveland—ALP) (7.04 p.m.): I recently joined with the member for Kawana, Chris Cummins, when the Premier launched the Centre for Multicultural and Community Development at the Sunshine Coast University. The mission of the centre is to contribute to the development of a society in which individuals and communities have the skills and capacities to participate fully in social, economic, cultural and political life, as well as to develop a society that values diversity and difference.

The centre is unique in that it is the only coordinated organisation in Queensland focusing on community, social and multicultural development, and the only one in Australia looking at multicultural issues in the context of community development and community engagement. The centre will have key functions including: research; intellectual leadership and scholarship; networking; pooling of expertise; building community capacity; information provision; training and professional development; building connections; and working in partnerships with government for policy development. These functions will be achieved through a range of projects and activities. The centre will produce reports, publications and training materials.

The university provides a supportive infrastructure for the centre to operate from. There is a pool of expertise of staff already established at the university. In addition, the university has significant connections within the region, within Queensland, Australia and overseas. The work of the centre will contribute toward this aim and can assist communities to effectively participate in issues which impact on the lives of those in the community.

Activities of the centre will include collaborative work with the Department of the Premier and Cabinet in four areas of community engagement: conceptualising dimensions of community engagement; engaging communities on the Sunshine Coast region, taken broadly from Caboolture to Gympie; developing a conceptualisation of 'multicultural engagement' and 'cultural citizenship'; and engaging the multicultural sector in Queensland and encouraging connections with the community engagement initiatives.

Multicultural policies, both at the Commonwealth and state levels, have existed since the 1970s. Despite this, in 2003 we still find that many groups from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds do not take part in government processes and fully exercise their rights as citizens of Australia. On the other side of the coin, the mainstream programs and agencies do not often value diversity and do not use inclusive processes.

This has resulted in fragmentation within the ethnic community sector with poor infrastructure resulting in a lack of development of leadership and training opportunities for people of diverse backgrounds. Additionally, the lack of people with expertise and skills in cross-cultural issues is evident in many recruitment processes within community and government positions. The lack of institutional and human social capacity has diminished the ability of communities to respond to issues and events in their lives. This has been further exacerbated by hostile community relations heightened by issues surrounding immigration, asylum seekers, events around September 11, 2001 and current global unrest. People and their interactions with each other are important aspects of any society. Cultural diversity plays an important role in any social interaction and influences the way we relate to each other.

In these sombre times of the war on Iraq and other crises, we are more than ever reminded of the need for institutions that support harmony, promote acceptance of difference, inform public debate and develop community capacity.