



Speech by  
**Grace Grace**

**MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL**

Hansard Tuesday, 4 August 2009

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## **ITALIAN CONSULATE OFFICES, BRISBANE AND ADELAIDE**

**Ms GRACE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (11.45 am): I rise to advise the House that on 15 June I was informed that a joint committee of the Italian parliament had announced the proposed and pending closure of the consulate offices in Brisbane and Adelaide as part of a worldwide consular network review. Although the details were not precise, it is believed that the likely closure of the consulate office in Brisbane would occur following the expiration of the term of the current consul for Queensland and the Northern Territory, Dr Francesco Capecci, most probably in early 2011. This announcement is a devastating blow to the Italian community in Queensland, which is very concerned about the pending closure of the Italian consulate. I am positive this decision will be hard fought against by the Italo-Australian community in this state. As an Australian-born Italian, I wholeheartedly lend my support to having this decision reversed.

The Italian consulate plays an important leadership role in Queensland, providing many services to those of Italian heritage including in the areas of culture and social and trade relations between this state and Italy. In addition, normal consular functions involving migration, visas and passports, together with services to the elderly and language activities, may suffer should this planned closure go ahead. An active and energised Italian consulate, established in Brisbane in 1925, has been an integral part of our community for many decades and has been central to many local Italian community activities, particularly Italian National Day, which was held on 2 June this year, at which I represented the Premier and addressed the large crowd in attendance.

Since my election I have had the opportunity and pleasure to work closely with the Italian consul and his staff on many projects and community events. In particular, I wish to mention the Abruzzo earthquake appeal. There is no doubt that the closure of the Italian consulate would mean that the hub that draws the Italian community together in many areas would be lost and the Italian culture in Brisbane and Queensland would be the poorer.

At a recent community meeting held on 27 July, organised by the President of Com.It.Es, Mariangela Stagnitti, and a member of CGIE, Luigi Casagrande, it was unanimously resolved to oppose the closure of the Italian consulates in Brisbane and Adelaide, and to embark upon a community campaign to reverse this decision. A petition has been prepared opposing the closure and calling on the Italian government to reverse its position and to ensure that Brisbane and Adelaide remain part of an efficient and modern diplomatic network in Australia. I urge all members of the House to sign the petition and I table a copy.

*Tabled paper:* Copy of petition to the President of the Republic of Italy, Prime Minister of Italy and Minister of Foreign Affairs expressing opposition to the closure of the Italian consulates of Adelaide and Brisbane [\[634\]](#).

I am a proud first-generation Australian Italian, as are the many Italian-born Queenslanders and their descendants proud of their heritage. In fact, since the mass immigration post World War II, Italians have played a significant and important role in Queensland and Australia, with people from Italian origin representing one of the largest ethnic groups in this state. Whether it is in the cane fields of North Queensland, in the vineyards of Stanthorpe or in the restaurants and cafes of South-East Queensland, not to mention the Italian master tradesmen in the construction industry, Italians have worked tirelessly to make better lives for themselves, their families and the nation.

Many of us from an Italian background have proudly called Australia home and have prospered in many fields—in the workplace, professions and community organisations. I could not think of a worse time to go ahead with this closure, particularly when so many young people of Italian parents are embracing their heritage and seeking Italian language and cultural skills.

Recently the Australia-Italian MP Forum of which I am a member, including 40 other Australian politicians of Italian heritage, held a meeting in Adelaide to resolve to express its deep concern about the decision of the Italian government to close the consular offices in Brisbane and Adelaide. The forum has called on the Prime Minister of the Italian Republic, Mr Silvio Berlusconi, to review this decision and to maintain consular offices in both Brisbane and Adelaide. I am pleased to inform the House that Premier Bligh has also written to the Italian Prime Minister requesting a reconsideration of the decision.

As reported in the *Australian* on 20 July, I welcome the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, taking the opportunity to raise this issue with Mr Berlusconi directly during the G8 summit. It is reported that Mr Rudd passed on the concerns of the local community and that Mr Berlusconi has agreed to examine the issue. This is welcome news. However, we must continue our fight against these pending closures and only rest when a reversal of the decision has been made and confirmed by the Italian government. It is imperative that we all support this campaign opposing the closure of the Italian consulates in Brisbane and Adelaide. We need to ensure that 27,000 students in 110 Queensland schools continue to receive Italian language funding and that Brisbane remains an important part of the Italian community in this nation and should not be abandoned at this time in our proud history.

I once again call on the Italian government to reconsider this decision and not to close the consulate offices in Brisbane and Adelaide. I thank all the community members who are working together to stop this decision going ahead for their hard work.