



Speech by

Hon. Annastacia Palaszczuk

MEMBER FOR INALA

Hansard Tuesday, 23 February 2010

CONSTITUTION (PREAMBLE) AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. A PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Disability Services and Multicultural Affairs) (4.05 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Constitution (Preamble) Amendment Bill 2009. The preamble recognises Queensland's rich and vibrant multicultural history. Today one in six Queenslanders were born overseas, and net overseas migration is the biggest contributor to our population growth. Throughout its history our great state has been shaped by cultures from all around the world. Sadly, this is a history the opposition wants to ignore. It wants to ignore the contribution of Queensland's multicultural communities and the contribution of Indigenous Queenslanders. This is yet another sign of the opposition's arrogant contempt for Queenslanders and its unwillingness to listen to what people in the community are saying.

The preamble is part of the government's response to the Queensland's 2020 Ideas to Action Forum, which recommended a preamble to the Constitution. It was drafted following widespread consultation, and the preamble reflects this. I quote from clause 4 of the bill, which states—

The people of Queensland, free and equal citizens of Australia ... acknowledge the achievements of our forebears, coming from many backgrounds, who together faced and overcame adversity and injustice, and whose efforts bequeathed to us, and future generations, a realistic opportunity to strive for social harmony ...

Unlike the opposition, the Bligh government recognises that Queensland's multicultural diversity is one of our state's greatest strengths. We value the contribution our multicultural communities make to Queensland and we look forward to the contribution they will make in many years to come.

In 2009 Queensland celebrated its 150th anniversary, and our diverse multicultural communities were at the forefront of these celebrations. Queenslanders from all backgrounds came together not only to celebrate the state's rich and diverse multicultural history but to cast an eye forward to the future. This brings me to one of the key points of the preamble. It is not just about Queensland's past; it is also about our future. The explanatory notes to the bill state—

The insertion of this preamble in the 150th anniversary year provides an enduring acknowledgement of Queensland's past and expresses the future aspirations of the people of this State.

One of my key priorities as multicultural affairs minister is to develop a stronger multicultural policy for all Queenslanders. That is why last October I launched a public discussion paper, 'A multicultural future ... for all of us'. The discussion paper will give Queenslanders a chance to have their say on multicultural policy this year. Already we have had three consultation forums, with 22 planned throughout the state. We want to hear from Queenslanders about multiculturalism, and we are keen to embrace their ideas because we know they have a lot to contribute. We want to know what is working out there and we want to know what we can do better as a government. It is outrageous that when the government is reaching out to the community the opposition is resorting to cheap political point-scoring by not supporting this preamble.

Last year I increased the core funding that the Bligh government provides to the Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland. This funding boost is in recognition of the vital work that the ECCQ does in advocating for Queensland's diverse multicultural communities.

The chair of the ECCQ, Ms Agnes Whiten, welcomed the funding boost and said that this was 'an important signal to all in the community that the Bligh government continued to give a high priority to the

importance of social harmony and recognition of Queensland's rich and diverse communities'. Today the ECCQ made its thoughts about the preamble very clear. It stated—

The Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland welcomes the introduction of a new Preamble to the Constitution of Queensland honouring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and acknowledging the achievements of people from diverse backgrounds. Ms. Agnus Whiten, Chair of ECCQ added that in the 150th year of the establishment of Queensland as a State this step is part of the reconciliation process with the first peoples of this land.

Furthermore, in acknowledging the achievements of people from diverse backgrounds, it embraces all of us ...

On the other hand, we know that the opposition has an atrocious track record on multicultural affairs. We know this because when it was last in government its own ethnic advisory committee told it so. In 1997, Nationals Premier Rob Borbidge was blasted by his own Ethnic Affairs Advisory Committee for his 'weak and mischievous' approach to dealing with racism. A *Courier-Mail* article by Martin Thomas dated 18 June 1997 states—

Advisory committee's chairwoman Mary Kalantzis said Government policies were misguided, haphazard and were helping to fuel racist attitudes.

She said the Borbidge Government had lost the confidence of ethnic communities.

Professor Kalantzis said Queensland's ethnic affairs policies were the most inadequate in the country.

Judging from the comments made about the preamble by members opposite earlier today, the opposition has not improved one bit when it comes to any policy or any consideration about multiculturalism in this state. Those opposite still have no position on multiculturalism and they clearly do not value the contribution of Queenslanders from diverse backgrounds. If they did they would be supporting this preamble that we are debating today.

As a state we are young, but Queensland's cultural history is long. Our multicultural communities are drawn from many cultures, some very ancient. From the first wave of English and Irish settlers to postwar European migration and the later waves of immigration from the Asia-Pacific, Africa and the Middle East, Queensland has continued to prosper thanks to this rich and diverse history. Queensland's migrants have helped to power the state's economy and enriched our cultural life in so many ways. The preamble recognises their contribution to our cultural and economic life and to the state's ongoing prosperity.

The preamble also recognises Indigenous Queenslanders as the first Queenslanders. Indigenous Queenslanders have a proud cultural heritage spanning thousands of years. Their artwork and dreamtime stories are richer and more ancient than those from anywhere else in the world. As the local member for Inala, I hold regular meetings with Indigenous Queenslanders and leaders, and I know firsthand the great pride they take in their cultural traditions. I am proud to acknowledge our very first Australians and will continue to do so at events where I represent the government. While the Bligh government continues to bridge the gap, the opposition seeks to divide.

Queensland's multicultural heritage is something we should all be proud of and embrace. This preamble acknowledges the enduring cultural legacy the state's multicultural communities have bequeathed to all Queenslanders. In her second reading speech the Premier stated—

The preamble provides context to Queensland's constitutional arrangements and framework and describes what our Constitution stands for—responsible and representative government with the purpose of fostering peace, welfare and good government.

In conclusion, we will continue to deliver and enhance services for our multicultural communities. We will continue to listen to the needs of our multicultural communities right across our state. This year the Bligh government will deliver a new multicultural policy for all of us. I commend the bill to the House.