




Speech By
Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

MULTICULTURAL RECOGNITION BILL

 **Mr PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (8.23 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Multicultural Recognition Bill 2012. As the shadow minister has outlined, this bill is about recognising the valuable contribution of Queensland's multicultural community and to further strengthen our commitment to providing quality assistance. This bill is the next piece in Queensland's evolution in recognising and celebrating cultural diversity. It is the culmination of several years of work and extensive consultation with the multicultural community, non-government service providers, the communities sector and local government. Consultation of this magnitude has not been conducted for any legislation since the election of the Newman LNP government. Unfortunately, I do not think that that will happen anytime soon.

I want to pick up on a few points made by the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. He claims that Labor had 20 years and that it was all too little too late when the original bill was introduced in late 2011, only to lapse owing to the March 2012 election. As many ministers know, and perhaps some of this cabinet may find out, sometimes you can be beaten by timing and competing interests on the *Notice Paper*. The minister said something along the lines of the House now having to be 'under pressure' to pass this bill. Let us fast forward 12 months into the Newman government. Over the past year it has scurried around to fill the *Notice Paper*. It has rushed bills through committees and it has rushed consultation.

Mr Elmes interjected.

Mr PITT: The minister should listen for a moment. We have all had concerns about that, but we also understand that that is part of what happens when there is a new government. The minister also talked about the meeting frequency of the proposed advisory council being only twice a year, which, by the way, was a minimum. I can certainly say to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs that the proposed multicultural advisory council in this bill would have met more than some other committees under the minister's purview, such as the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council, or perhaps the Just Futures task force. Why is that? Because the minister axed both of those advisory groups. So now they have no chance of meeting at all. It does not matter that the minister wants to talk about a multicultural council that he has set up meeting four times and having those discussions, these committees will not meet at all because they have been dumped. That is the sort of thing we have come to see from this government. So fair go. The minister has had 12 months to put something in this space and he has not done it. Once he has introduced a multicultural bill and undertaken the—and I think the term he used was 'proper'—consultation around a multicultural bill, which we have done over many years, perhaps he could pick up on some of that consultation. We would be happy for him to do it. A proper level of consultation is not something that we have seen from this government. I hope that changes and I hope the minister might be the person to do that.

Labor has delivered policy and legislation that is truly in the interest of Queenslanders. During the Health Community Services Committee's inquiry into the bill it received nine submissions with all of them citing this bill as a positive step and supporting its passage. Labor's Queensland multicultural policy, titled A Multicultural Future for All of Us clearly states that the Queensland government will—

- strengthen leadership and accountability for the policy's implementation
- improve cross-government collaboration
- strengthen the engagement of Queenslanders from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in government planning, policy development and program delivery
- improve data collection to inform programs and services for Queenslanders from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

This legislation, in conjunction with the multicultural policy, will build on the progress already made in Queensland by successive Labor governments. Over time we have increased funding to Multicultural Affairs Queensland, including the introduction of the Community Action for a Multicultural Society program, which allows organisations to employ community workers to undertake advocacy and community capacity building for people from CALD backgrounds. We have also had a successful partnership with the Local Government Association of Queensland and a number of local governments across Queensland with the establishment of the Local Area Multicultural Partnerships—or LAMP program. This program assists local government to ensure that they are delivering appropriate and relevant services to people from culturally diverse backgrounds.

In 2010 the Labor government amended the Constitution of Queensland to include a preamble recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first Australians. It also said—

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.

I was proud to be in this place to vote in favour of this valuable addition to our Constitution. What did the Liberal National Party do? It voted against the amendment to the Constitution. This is the conservative party in the 21st century—not of the Bjelke-Petersen era, but the 21st century. But you would not know that by the actions of those opposite. Yes, the preamble was largely recognising our first Australians—and very appropriately so, I might add—but the Leader of the Opposition at the time, the member for Surfers Paradise, said in that instance that the preamble.

... elevated recognition of one ethnic group within the Queensland community.

He stated further—

It is a superficial nod in the direction of political correctness and is designed to divide Queenslanders and not unite us.

The LNP members voted against the preamble and said horrible things and then they went along to the parliamentary reception celebrating the passage of the amendment. Their opposition to progressive reforms seems only able to be overcome by a free lunch and a drink. Here we are again: a new leader, new slogans, but same old repugnant approach to progressive reform.

In my community in Far North Queensland we have a very vibrant multicultural community that has worked and lived together for many decades, as many members of this House would appreciate in regard to their own areas. In my part of the world, whether it is the Italian community that came after the Second World War or the Chinese and Indian communities or the Pacific Islander Community or the Hmong community, there are so many different and varied groups living in Far North Queensland and it is great to have their cultures and traditions become part of the greater social fabric of Queensland.

The work that these communities do in their everyday lives is highlighted on those special occasions such as the Chinese New Year celebrations I recently attended or the Punjabi Cultural and Sport Society's annual kabaddi tournament. I know that the diverse community that is Queensland is a positive for our society that should be celebrated and encouraged. That is obviously not the view of the Newman government which has cut funding for multicultural community grants, the department and many community organisations and events. There is a very strong Indian community in Far North Queensland. The Sikh community in the Mulgrave electorate is an enormously proud group of people who have done many amazing things and epitomise some of the thoughts that I have heard from some of those opposite when they have talked about some of the people in their communities. They are hardworking, honest people who have done great things and built themselves into a terrific part of our community.

I have had a lot to do with multicultural communities throughout Queensland growing up in Far North Queensland and later when leading work on skilled and business migration when I was a public servant before coming into the parliament. I did a lot of work around post-arrival settlement and ensuring the appropriate support was provided. I would encourage the LNP members of this parliament to see some common sense and actually stand up for their communities instead of blindly following the ill-conceived decision to vote against this bill. How will the LNP members representing electorates like Algeester, Brisbane Central, Logan, Springwood, Waterford, Mount Ommaney or Sunnybank vote on this bill? What will they say to their sizeable ethnic and culturally diverse communities? There is nothing offensive about this bill. There is nothing tokenistic about it either. No doubt we will hear ad nauseam that it is and other excuses to not support this bill. What it comes down to, friends in this House, is that this bill is not being supported because it is a Labor bill—pure and simple. I know what I will do tonight, I know what each and every one of the Labor opposition will do: we will stand up for the multicultural community across Queensland and vote in favour of the Multicultural Recognition Bill. I would encourage all members of this House to follow our lead. I encourage them to not go backwards in time. I ask them to resist the progress that we are seeing in their party room and not resist the progress we want to happen in the broader community. We do not want to see it for the sake of engaging in partisan politicking purely because this was a Labor bill and it was Labor's idea. I would rather them be able to stand up for their local communities and see this bill for what it is—a step forward in terms of having a broader multicultural community in Queensland—and join us in doing what is right for Queensland.