




Speech By
Ann Leahy

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

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MULTICULTURAL RECOGNITION BILL

 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (3.20 pm): I rise to speak on the Multicultural Recognition Bill 2015. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee staff, Karl, Lucy and Carla, for their assistance with the inquiry and the professionalism which they have displayed throughout the process of examining this legislation. I would also like to thank the many organisations and individuals who made submissions in relation to the bill and who appeared at the public hearings. I would also like to thank my fellow committee members from both sides of the House for their participation and congratulate the new minister on her appointment to the portfolio.

The Multicultural Recognition Bill applies to government entities—for instance, a government department; a Public Service office; an agency, authority, commission, corporation, instrumentality or other entity established under an act or under state authorisation for a public or state purpose; another entity declared under a regulation; or a registry or other administrative office of a court of the state of any jurisdiction. The bill does not apply to government owned corporations, local governments, the Parliamentary Service and non-government organisations funded to deliver services on behalf of government departments. The bill does not create any rights for anyone and it does not impose any legally enforceable obligations or create a civil cause of action based on contravention of provisions and failure to comply with the act does not affect the validity of any decisions.

Even without this bill there has been considerable engagement and spirit in the area of multiculturalism. For instance, in Brisbane about 17 per cent of households speak a language other than English. Brisbane City Council provides funding for various multicultural events and activities across Brisbane on an annual basis. This is complemented by the work of the Lord Mayor's multicultural round table which is in its 10th year of operation. The 22-member round table represents various groups such as the Chinese Club of Queensland and the German Australian Business Association and ensures a productive two-way communication with the Lord Mayor on multicultural issues.

Multiculturalism is also happening in the electorate of Warrego in the community and also, most importantly, in the private sector. There are many pubs in Western Queensland that have a backpacker behind the bar who is visiting rural and regional Australia during their travels. Just the other day I was in Meandarra and there was an Irish backpacker working in the local hotel and doing a fantastic job. In my past visits to places like Birdsville and Innamincka I have found that all of the hotel staff are backpackers who are highly regarded by their employers for their work efforts and ethic.

After the Royal Hotel in Roma was unfortunately destroyed by fire in November 2014, about 15 very distressed backpackers who had just escaped with their lives were in serious need of consular assistance as they had lost all their possessions in that fire. They had no phone, no passport, no identification documents and only the clothes that they were wearing left. These great young people came from Ireland, England, Canada, Nepal, India and some were hoping to head home for Christmas with their flights booked and now had no passports or ID to leave Australia. I assisted in the electorate

office in arranging consular assistance for those who required emergency passports and travel documents and also we gave them some cold water and an air-conditioned office where they could at least base themselves for a day or two and collect their thoughts and plan for the future because they were quite shell-shocked. They now had no jobs and no possessions and they were in a different country.

The community at Roma rallied around these young people. They did everything they could to help them with clothes, jobs, a roof over their head in some cases and an empathetic understanding of what it would be like if this happened to one of their own family members in another country. I am pleased to advise the parliament that the Royal Hotel is now well on its way to being rebuilt as it is an iconic building in the main street. I congratulate the Garvie family on their vision for the hotel. They have put a lot of time and effort into rebuilding the hotel and the future plans and designs are outstanding.

There are also very multicultural workforces in the Warrego electorate. There is a fast-food outlet in my electorate where nearly all of the staff at the outlet are from a non-English-speaking background. The hospitality industry has experienced a significant skills shortage in the Surat Basin in recent times due to the expansion of the resources industry. Many of these people have continued to reside in the Surat Basin and they play a very important role in the multicultural diversity of the community. There is a meat processing facility in the electorate exporting products to many countries in the Americas and Asia and they employ a very high proportion of Vietnamese staff. This has been very successful. Should more staff be required in this business they work closely with the Vietnamese families and they ensure that any new staff that are coming to Australia are actually members of those families so it helps them adapt with the work environment and also the community in Western Queensland because it is quite remote.

There are many people from diverse backgrounds in rural and regional Queensland, in my electorate and across the state who embrace multicultural diversity and also people from different backgrounds. I encourage the government to ensure that there is adequate representation from rural and regional areas of Queensland on the advisory council and I would also encourage the government to seek the input of many rural and regional multicultural groups and communities to provide their input and advice to the advisory council at every opportunity.

Multiculturalism is also very well demonstrated in festivals across the electorate such as the Santos Food and Fire Festival and the Tara Festival of Culture and Camel Races. The Santos Food and Fire Festival, which has now become the Maranoa Food and Fire Festival, is the home of multicultural food and entertainment and is a free event for the community. The oil and gas company Santos brought together communities from across the globe at a biannual festival and there are people of all backgrounds together with delicious traditional foods. There could be traditional recipes from Denmark, Africa or even an American hot dog.

The Tara Festival of Culture and Camel Races has an amazing display of multicultural activities, much of which is organised by a volunteer committee of local people who live and work in Tara and do a tremendous job organising the events. There is a Chinese dragon workshop, an African mask workshop, a global kitchen workshop, Heilani Polynesian performers, Japanese drummers, African drumming workshops, a Latin Mafia band, Peruvian pan pipes, a drumdance belly dance and the customary yabbie and camel races. There are many examples of harmonious inclusion of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in rural and regional Queensland, and I have no doubt this will continue due to the efforts of the local volunteers and private businesses. I commend the legislation to the House.