




Speech By
Hon. Cameron Dick

MEMBER FOR WOODRIDGE

Record of Proceedings, 16 February 2016

MULTICULTURAL RECOGNITION BILL

 **Hon. CR DICK** (Woodridge—ALP) (Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services) (5.05 pm): I rise this afternoon to proudly support the Multicultural Recognition Bill. I do that as the state member for Woodridge, one of the most culturally diverse electorates in Queensland and perhaps one of the most culturally diverse electorates in the Commonwealth. The Australian Labor Party has long been a champion of social justice, fairness, inclusion and a supporter of all members of society no matter what that individual's origin may be. Our party supports and celebrates the strength that comes from diversity. Our state is home to many people who have, over the long history of our state, come to Queensland from around the world as refugees or immigrants and now call our state home. This bill recognises the great diversity that comes from multiculturalism and quite properly recognises that in the law of our state.

Nowhere is multicultural vibrancy more evident than in the electorate of Woodridge. More than half of my constituents speak a language other than English at home—well beyond the Queensland figure of around 36 per cent. More than 30 per cent of Woodridge's population have been born overseas compared with the Queensland figure of 20 per cent born in a foreign country—almost 50 per cent more than applies across the rest of Queensland. This already great part of our state is made all the more vibrant and rich because of these facts. It is a privilege to represent the diversity that is the Woodridge community in this parliament.

I am consistently overwhelmed by the number of very generous invitations I receive to participate in cultural festivities and celebrations in the Woodridge electorate. It has been my privilege to enjoy countless ceremonies and traditional annual events and religious services with, between and amongst a wide range and collection of cultures in my community. I cannot attend all of those events, but I attend as many as I can, from casual social gatherings to formal annual celebrations of culture and faith.

As the member for Woodridge I spend my time working with important and valuable local community groups like the Ethnic Communities Council of Logan, the Voice of Samoa, the Islamic Association of Logan City, the Cambodian Buddhist Association of Queensland, the Khmer Buddhist Society of Queensland and a very large number of organisations that represent the very diverse number of African communities, all of which uniquely enrich the Woodridge electorate and the lives of those living within our community.

As Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services I also recognise the important role certain groups in our state are playing in providing for the health needs of Queenslanders from culturally diverse backgrounds. From a health perspective, agencies and organisations like the Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma, the Queensland Transcultural Mental Health Centre and the Queensland Centre for Multicultural Mental Health and Wellbeing, also known as Harmony Place, play an important role in our state's health system.

For 20 years, those agencies and organisations have been providing crucial specialist clinical and nonclinical services and support to migrants, refugees and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Last year at Parliament House I was very pleased to celebrate the 20th anniversary of those organisations and their contribution to Queensland at a reception that I co-hosted with the then minister for multicultural affairs, the member for Waterford. Our government also works closely with the Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland in reaching out to a vast number of communities across Queensland. For example, one of the things that we work on together is increased access to HIV testing among priority populations. We work closely with the Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland in delivering programs such as that.

As a Queensland health system, it is so important for us to work with organisations such as the Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland, which then partners with community organisations such as the Queensland African Communities Council, which I have had the privilege of working with. Madam Deputy Speaker, you have also recognised the work of people such as Elijah Buol, the outgoing president. I recognise Robert Mukombozi, the incoming president, and all of the leaders in the African communities that I have the privilege of working with in the electorate of Woodridge. The Queensland government's HIV strategy recognises that people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are a priority population for HIV testing and prevention. The ECCQ is also a partner in the OraSure project, which provides HIV oral testing kits that are delivered via post as a method of providing access to HIV screening to priority populations in rural and remote Queensland. Wherever they are in Queensland, whatever their ethnicity or cultural background, we work in partnership with the ECCQ and community organisations to deliver that testing and that care to Queenslanders. As I have mentioned, the project has also engaged African communities across Queensland. I particularly mention the work being done on the Darling Downs through the ECCQ's engagement of bilingual workers to conduct HIV testing.

In my own local community of Logan, Queensland Health is also a strong supporter of the groundbreaking Logan Together project, which is a collective of people, government departments across local, state and federal governments and also non-government organisations that are working together for the betterment of the Logan area. In particular, it is designed to help close the health gap for children from birth to the age of eight years. Of course, one of the target groups is the culturally diverse community of the City of Logan. I am very pleased to support that project in my capacity as the Minister for Health and Ambulance Services.

The diverse groups that make up my electorate of Woodridge and those that are improving the health of Queensland's ethnic communities deserve full recognition for their invaluable contribution to the community. I am proud to champion that for them here today by supporting this bill. The purpose of the bill is to better recognise the contribution those groups make to the state as a whole. Through establishing the Multicultural Queensland Charter and the Multicultural Queensland Advisory Council, this bill will promote Queensland as a unified, harmonious and inclusive community. In particular, I draw the attention of the House to the charter. Clauses 2 and 5 of the charter stand out. Clause 2 states—

The people of Queensland come from many diverse backgrounds and have worked, and continue to work, together to build a prosperous, fair and harmonious Queensland.

Clause 5 states—

A shared commitment, among members of the Queensland community, to mutual respect, fair treatment and valuing the diversity of peoples in the community fosters a caring, safe and inclusive community.

I could not agree more with those sentiments. The charter will make an important contribution to how we embrace and engage Queenslanders from diverse cultural backgrounds.

The bill also calls for the development of a multicultural policy and action plan and for government employees to be aware of this plan and the charter. It also establishes reporting obligations for government entities, which I think is significant. Our government's wide range of policies, programs and services must be reflective of the diversity of the Queensland community and this bill will ensure that occurs. It will also ensure that any changes to policies, programs and services help to address issues such as economic participation and community cohesion. I regard that as significant, particularly economic participation, for the electorate of Woodridge. We have a very high unemployment rate and anything that can be done to engage people in work and help address economic participation are very significant things.

I recognise the work of the current Minister for Multicultural Affairs, the member for Brisbane Central. I thank her for coming to Logan recently to join me and other state and federal members of parliament who represent the City of Logan to celebrate Waitangi Day. I thank her for making that effort. I also recognise the work of the immediate past minister for multicultural affairs, the member for Waterford. I thank her for her contribution. I recognise the work of the Premier when she served as the

minister for multicultural affairs in the 53rd Parliament. In that parliament she was, in a sense, the prime driver for a bill and a statutory way to recognise the great diversity that comes from multiculturalism in Queensland. I recognise her contribution as well.

In summary, you can measure the maturity of a society by the breadth of its diversity and how that diversity is recognised and embraced. The strength of a democracy is dependent on many voices. I believe that Queensland is a stronger state when we allow all those voices to be heard, including the voices of citizens who are refugees, migrants or otherwise came to Queensland through various channels and pathways. That is why I am proud to support the bill and I commend it to the House.