




Speech By
Christopher Whiting

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

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MULTICULTURAL RECOGNITION BILL

 **Mr WHITING** (Murrumbidgee—ALP) (5.45 pm): I also rise to speak in support of the bill. As the member for Murrumbidgee I do believe that the Multicultural Recognition Bill is a key mechanism for the government to ensure those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are really given opportunities to participate in the Queensland economy and the broader Queensland community.

One of the reasons I want to talk about this is that I have a very large Pasifika community within the electorate of Murrumbidgee, specifically within Deception Bay but broadly Murrumbidgee, which encompasses North Lakes. We have a very broad international feel to our community with people coming from all over the world to live in North Lakes. I have had a lot of experience with the Pasifika community in Deception Bay—that is the Samoans, the Tongans and the New Zealand Maoris as well.

One of the things I can talk about—and I know that this bill picks it up and I really do appreciate that—is the economic impact of having the Samoan community within Murrumbidgee. We have a festival called Pasifika Vibes, which is a great celebration of the island lifestyle: food, dance and a variety of activities including playing a game called kirikiti, which is the island version of cricket. It is similar but quite different at the same time. This festival, which in the past has taken place in Deception Bay, really helps deliver a mini food based economy. The local shops benefit largely. There is the local hiring of tents. There is a huge economic impact from this particular festival. In fact, this festival grew too large for our community and it had to move to Redcliffe. It brings people from all around South-East Queensland to our region for the day to spend money and have a great time. This is one of the beneficial economic impacts that we do see from our Pasifika communities.

What I also like about this bill is that the advisory council will be really representative of these diverse groups in the Queensland community including in regional Queensland. One of the things that we have often overlooked is that multiculturalism is a very regional phenomenon as well. The multicultural communities really contribute to the vibrancy of our regional communities up and down the eastern seaboard and inland and coastal Queensland.

If the economy is changing in these communities, if there are some industries that are changing—we are seeing perhaps a loss of blue-collar jobs—often multicultural communities can bring a new lease of life to those communities. We have seen that in my home community of Deception Bay. Many years ago it was a remote and regional fishing village and it has now become an outer urban suburb. As I have said, it has a large Pasifika population.

What I really appreciate is how our Samoan community has contributed to the fabric of our society, and that is embodied in one story, which is the creation of the Maota Fono, the first artificial meeting hut of a Samoan community outside Samoa. Traditionally, these huts were coconut trees banded together to create a shelter. My community proposed to build an artificial one, one made out of steel and concrete. It would be durable and would certainly last the time.

It was put to council, and council took a risk and supported it because it meant the allocation of a large amount of parkland. Council put money towards it in the old Caboolture council days, but the money really came in from the state government through a Community Renewal project. With this project we created something that has been a drawcard throughout the region and broader than that as well. One of the ceremonies that we had included the blessing of the Maota Fono which was attended by the Samoan Prime Minister, and when Quentin Bryce was the Queensland Governor she came for events as well.

Building a simple steel, tin and concrete structure has really added to the fabric of the community in Deception Bay. We have a new meeting place, it is something that people come to see, it is an item of talk and a real focus for our community. I think the story of the Maota Fono really sums up how our Pasifika communities add character and depth to our society and they make it very interesting. They have also breathed economic life into our community. I pay tribute to the local Council of Chiefs, the Fraternal of Samoan Pastors and the peak body Aiga Samoa for all they bring to my home community of Deception Bay.

I think this bill highlights that the Palaszczuk Labor government wants to help Queenslanders from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds take advantage of the tremendous opportunities that our state offers, no matter where they come from. I must say that we do offer a lot in this state; for example, we love local festivals and we do offer many opportunities to hold those festivals.

As a councillor I helped many of our multicultural communities apply for council grants. As I said, I helped them apply for the Community Renewal grant from the state government. That is a great Labor initiative. This was how the Pasifika Vibes festival happened as well. I have also worked closely with our multicultural communities to help them take advantage of things like the Gambling Community Benefit Fund, which I think is something quite unique to Queensland. It really does offer our groups a great chance to build up not only their capital and their infrastructure in our community and multicultural communities but their social capital as well. I know that my multicultural groups are really great at accessing grants throughout Queensland, and I certainly think that this Multicultural Recognition Bill will help give them the confidence they need to keep applying for these grants and building that social capital within our communities. I know that the Pasifika community is very grateful for what Queensland has provided in a monetary sense and also in terms of opportunities.

Multicultural communities can, and do, continue to provide us with opportunities to develop a diversified workforce as well as business opportunities in tourism. For example, I have seen many of our multicultural community members working on the Narangba Industrial Estate. This is a core blue-collar workforce in our region and there are probably over 2,000 workers in that area now. It is a great opportunity for them to enter the job market and buy homes in our community. A lot of our multicultural community is now moving into white-collar jobs, and I particularly think of Elizabeth Hunt, who works for an insurance company. She is an office holder of Aiga Samoa and the daughter of one of our Samoan chiefs, Hanneman Hunt, who has gone back to Samoa to be part of their Samoan Council of Chiefs.

Mr Rickuss: There is a big workforce of Samoans in the Logan City Council area.

Mr WHITING: Indeed. In local and state governments we are seeing great diversity in our workforce, and the multicultural community does appreciate that Queensland offers great opportunities. I do believe that the bill and the charter will improve the competitiveness of Queensland and I think they will improve our prosperity within the global community. Having our Pasifika nations in Deception Bay and Murrumba means that we have connections across the Pacific and business ideas flow backwards and forwards. People come from our community in Deception Bay and create jobs and businesses across the Pacific, and they also bring in ideas to create local businesses.

In closing I would like to say that our newly arrived migrants can be at a disadvantage, but the Palaszczuk government is working towards improving economic participation for our migrants and refugees. This bill and charter will help grow our economy. The charter is a great initiative and an integral part of this bill, and we should all welcome it. It will promote principles of inclusion, fairness and harmony, and these are Queensland values. The immigrant community has driven the rise of importance in these values, and with this bill we will have a charter and a policy that will make those values even more important in our community. This bill and its charter show that this government is leading by example, and I commend this bill to the House.