




Speech By  
**Jennifer Howard**

**MEMBER FOR IPSWICH**

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**MULTICULTURAL RECOGNITION BILL**

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (4.51 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Multicultural Recognition Bill 2015. In doing so, I would like to honour the former minister for multicultural affairs for the work that she has done on this bill and the new multicultural affairs minister, whose first bill is a really special one to have introduced into the House. To hear everybody in the chamber speak in support of it is an important moment for this parliament. I would also like to acknowledge the work that the parliamentary committee has done in putting together its report.

Australia has a proud multicultural heritage. In my own electorate of Ipswich, I can boast migrants from around the world with different faiths, cultures and languages. I am proud to say that, since my election, I have attended multicultural events, such as Harmony Day celebrations, the Ipswich Malayali Association football carnival and the Diwali festival of lights hosted by the Indian Mehfil restaurant. I would like to commend Rajesh Sharma and his team at Mehfil for the work that they do in putting that festival together. Last year, over 500 people attended.

In August last year, I hosted a wonderful morning tea in my electorate office for representatives of the various ethnic groups in my community. I was visited by constituents from Afghanistan, Sudan, Rwanda, Eritrea, Kenya, the Congo and even New Zealand. The morning tea was a great opportunity for me to understand the difficulties facing refugees and migrants in my community and it was heartening to hear their stories of resilience. It was also heartening to hear their impressions of our country. To them all, Australia is a country of great opportunity. It is welcoming and positive. It is a country that celebrates diversity. I commend this government for introducing legislation that encourages this diversity. This legislation will help to improve services for the future by building a better understanding of our culturally and linguistically diverse community. It will strengthen our connection through the work of the newly created multicultural advisory council and, most importantly, through the establishment of a multicultural Queensland charter.

Although the migrants I met in my electorate office last August for Multicultural Week were positive about their futures, they recognised that there is still some way to go. Like me, these constituents understand that international events such as conflict and economic matters can affect how we respond to newly arrived migrants. That is why it is important for this government to have legislation that promotes harmony and inclusion and gives a voice to our migrant population. The newly created Multicultural Queensland Advisory Council will do just that. It will help provide advice to the government on relevant issues. It will make recommendations on where there is a need for policy or programs. It will highlight any barriers that we may have to delivering these services. Most importantly, it will become a strong advocate for those in our communities who do not have a voice.

But legislation alone is not enough to help improve social inclusion for our migrant population. Legislation cannot change community attitudes on its own. That is why I am working to instigate an interfaith group in Ipswich that has as its charter a role to help new migrants settle in my community.

This group will not only work with the new arrivals to my city but also promote multiculturalism and raise awareness in our community of the richness that different nationalities and cultures can bring. I am hoping to use Harmony Day this year as an opportunity to launch this interfaith group, which will be made up of representatives of the religious groups in my electorate as well as multicultural agencies. I am looking forward to the challenges and opportunities that this new group will bring to Ipswich.

This government is about action. During the election campaign last year we promised to deliver positive outcomes for all Queenslanders. This government promised to ensure that policies, programs and services were responsive to Queensland's growing multicultural population. After all, I believe that multiculturalism is our greatest strength. I am proud to say that this legislation delivers on that promise.