




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR LOGAN

Record of Proceedings, 16 February 2016

MULTICULTURAL RECOGNITION BILL

 **Mr POWER** (Logan—ALP) (5.15 pm): For some of us, multiculturalism is so much a part of the Australian character that we simply see this bill as a natural extension of the role of government. The Uniting Church of Australia sums up that position in its submission on the bill. It states—

The Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) came into being ... in June 1977. In 1985, the UCA explicitly declared itself to be a multicultural church, through the adoption of a landmark statement on the gift and challenge of cultural diversity.

We can see that the UCA made that statement early but went on to state—

In the 30 years since then, the UCA in its various councils and agencies throughout Australia has embarked upon the long and challenging task of giving practical expression to this commitment, recognising that the full empowerment and participation of peoples of all cultural backgrounds necessarily is transformative of the institution and its practices.

That statement made by the UCA really sums up what this bill is about and what we hope to do to give practical expression, through the Queensland government, to the principles of multiculturalism that we all ascribe to. Of course, the UCA wholeheartedly supports the creation of a multicultural Queensland council and the principles proposed in the multicultural charter being enshrined in legislation.

That was not always the way. When my ancestors first came to this country in the 1830s, the country did not respect or encourage multiculturalism. The speaking of languages other than English by convicts was banned. Some religious services were banned and ministers of religion were deported. Indeed, a convict's loyalty was questioned simply for speaking their mother tongue or practising their faith. Australia and Queensland have changed since those early days. We value the diversity of immigration and the benefit it brings to our country. However, this has not always been a smooth process in our nation's history—those of us who remember the White Australia Policy know that to be true—nor, indeed, is it even in our recent history. We in this place know full well the irresponsible and emotive power of the anti-immigration and anti-multicultural powers of the One Nation party, yet in our recent history they were not alone in toying with such emotions.

In January 2007, the Howard government removed the word 'multicultural' from the name of the department of immigration and multicultural affairs, changing its name to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. The then holder of that office, Andrew Robb, said that the term 'multicultural' had been transformed by interest groups into a philosophy that put 'allegiances to original culture ahead of national loyalty'. Of course, those were the same words that were used by the Irish in colonial Australia, recycled by the modern Liberal Party, this time with a new target.

As we know, Mr Robb was not demoted but instead promoted within the culture of the Liberal Party. Federal MP Andrew Leigh said in the federal parliament—

... according to journalist Lenore Taylor, the Member for Cook, Scott Morrison, told Shadow Cabinet last year that the Coalition should capitalise on the electorate's growing concerns about Muslim immigration.

Not only was he not publicly rebuked and repudiated; he now dangerously holds one of the more important elected offices in our land.

Even more recently we have seen a Liberal Party senator for South Australia link the policy of multiculturalism to a cause of violence. Disgusting, is it not, that the sharing of respect and diversity of culture in Australia should be linked to violence? Former Liberal Prime Minister of Australia Malcolm Fraser knew this to be wrong. He promoted multiculturalism and formed the SBS. He described the success of Australian immigration programs as being best when immigrants 'were welcomed warmly with assistance and with generosity'.

Given these attacks on multiculturalism by the MPs from the conservative parties, it is heartening that today the opposition supports this bill. It is disappointing that the previous government did not take up this bill during the previous term of government as much of the work for this bill was put in place by former minister, then opposition leader and now Premier, Anastacia Palaszczuk.

In the wide consultation that occurred around the state in the lead-up to the preparation of the bill I was lucky enough to represent the then minister for communities and multicultural affairs, Shannon Fentiman, at a consultation session on the bill at the Gould Adams Community Centre, which, as many members would know, is in the great city of Logan on Kingston Road, Kingston. This was a very worthwhile process where the detail of the bill was carefully examined and workshopped.

After my introductory comments I participated with one of the smaller groups. I wish to share something of the discussion that went on. I asked the group whether they had any concerns about the treatment and role of women within some societies and the values around the role and place of women that were prevalent within our society not so very long ago.

A woman of Chinese origin who works in migrant settlement told this story by way of answer. She told me that during her work she was going to greet a new migrant from a conservative and very traditional Islamic background and she put out her hand to shake as a way of greeting, as was her culture. He followed his tradition and withdrew his hand, leading to a somewhat uncomfortable situation. She explained that there was an interaction afterwards that was both professional and worthwhile, though there was still the initial clumsy greeting between them. She would have continued to respect his wishes from then on.

During a break a friend of the man from the same traditional Islamic background explained that in this culture many women shake hands and do not mean any disrespect. The man explained to his traditional friend that Australia was full of so many cultures and that as new migrants multiculturalism meant something for them, too. It meant that, while their culture would be accepted and understood, they also had a role to understand other Australian cultures.

From that conversation on, the new migrant always made a point of shaking the lady's hand every single time they met. It was his way of saying that he was both proud to be Australian and accepted Australian multiculturalism, especially knowing that his own culture would be respected.

I now turn to some of the submissions on the bill made to the Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee. I spoke about the Uniting Church submission. A great number of the submitters were proud of the role that Queensland has in multiculturalism. I will not go through them now because time, unfortunately, does not allow me to. I commend the committee on going out and listening to the community. I commend the minister on having roundtable discussions, which I was lucky enough to participate in.

The proposed charter enshrines eight principles that recognise a shared commitment by us all to a multicultural Queensland. The bill also provides strong accountabilities, including a requirement for the responsible minister to report to parliament on the outcomes of multicultural policy at least every three years. I look forward to that report from the minister. We have heard that government agencies will work to gather data on the bill. The bill is also a statement of who we are and the aspiration we have to celebrate the diversity of our state.

As the member for Logan, I proudly get to celebrate so many cultural activities with so many in the community. I have been to Diwali, Jewish 150, the Romanian Wine Festival, Ramadan at family homes but also Ramadan dinners at the Logan mosques, St Patrick's Day festivities, Christmas carols, Clean Up Australia Day with the Ahmadiyya community, Chinese New Year, Hmong New Year, Pasifika and Pan-African Day. I am sure I have missed out so many great events that I have been invited to and enjoyed. This is one of the joys of being the member for Logan and celebrating with so many the community spirit.

Multiculturalism does not just exist as a festival, though, or one day a year. It is also something we have in our hearts. To that extent, I would like to share one special event that I attended at the Snap Fresh factory. Snap Fresh is in the Crestmead industrial estate, which is proudly part of my electorate.

Snap Fresh prepares meals for Qantas all over the world. They also have a massively diverse community that work at the factory. Each year on Harmony Day they down tools for a special concert. It is an absolutely fantastic display of music from all over the world.

I am proud of the city of Logan's diversity. I know that this bill looks to improve how we as Queenslanders celebrate the many cultures that make up the great city of Logan and our great state. I commend the bill to the House.