




Speech By
Mark Furner

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

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MULTICULTURAL RECOGNITION BILL

 **Mr FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (4.34 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Multicultural Recognition Bill 2015. I congratulate the new minister for multiculturalism, the member for Brisbane Central, Grace Grace, for her longstanding work with multicultural groups as a previous leader of the trade union movement.

One of the purposes of the bill is to recognise the valuable contribution of diverse groups of people to the Queensland community. We have such a diverse group of migrants from a variety of different backgrounds within our Queensland community—within our nation in fact. It has been an absolute pleasure for me, through my upbringing and through my careers, to have engagement with people from those organisations and those groups.

Another purpose of the bill is to promote Queensland as a unified, harmonious and inclusive community by establishing the multicultural charter. What better mechanism than a charter to ensure cohesive relationships with the migrants to this country and the people who migrated to this country some years ago? I commend the Palaszczuk Labor government on this initiative and on the purposes and objectives set out in this bill.

The bill also provides opportunity for newly arrived migrants, who are often disadvantaged in participating in the economy. If you look at the diversity of participation in the economy you see that it is diverse in itself. I refer to the Taiwanese community. I know that Ken Lai, the director-general of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office, brings so many opportunities to our state. The Taiwanese community in Queensland is the greatest diaspora of Taiwanese in this country. The members for Sunnybank, Stretton and I, along with many other members, have been to a number of Taiwanese events. The connections, the purpose and the involvement they have in their communities and the contributions they make to our economy are so significant.

You also see people from other backgrounds—I refer to many friends of mine from African communities and from African backgrounds—who struggle. I have been to many events with the member for Bulimba—on Africa Day and other events—where we engage with those people. They are extraordinary. They are marvellous, beautiful people who bring a wonderful culture to these shores. I will continue going to those events as long as I possibly can because I enjoy it so much. This bill is a great opportunity to embrace multiculturalism in our communities and those migrants who come to our shores. It is so important that we as parliamentarians do that.

I am very privileged to have a past and a career that dealt with multiculturalism in many ways. I guess it all started back in my days as an official looking after workers at one of the biggest multicultural companies in this state, Golden Circle Cannery. At times you would go down there, during the pineapple crush or during other fruit-picking seasons, and see people from different backgrounds—Vietnamese, Chinese, Filipino, Indian, South Sea islander, Samoan and so on. There would be no better feeling than

to walk into that large lunch room and be offered an opportunity to sit at the table with them and share their lunch. This bill will go a long way to supporting the cohesiveness of people gathering together, whatever their background, to make sure they meet, engage and celebrate their differences.

Previously, as a Queensland senator, I also attended many multicultural events every weekend. In fact, there was not a weekend that went by that I did not attend a multicultural event, and in most cases along with my good friend Senator Moore. She still continues to do that as a form of engagement in our communities right across Queensland.

Mr Pearce: A great senator.

Mr FURNER: That is right; she is a great senator. I also chaired the African Ministerial Consultative Committee in Canberra during my last couple of years in the Senate to ensure that there was communication with the ministers responsible for migration, for employment and for education so that the African community right across the nation had the opportunity to ensure they were engaged. They had the ears of those ministers to ensure that they were not disadvantaged as they became engaged in their communities. I also became an active member of the Queensland African Communities Council back when it was first established. Back in those days—he is still a good friend of mine—

Ms Farmer: A fantastic group.

Mr FURNER: It is probably one of the best multicultural groups in the south-east corner, but there are so many that I do not want to distinguish one from the other. I still keep in contact with the previous president who established that group, Daniel Zingifuaboro. When you consider his upbringing and his passage to Australia, that story is amazing in itself. He came here as a humanitarian refugee, was educated in Queensland and is now back in South Sudan as a minister in that new government. It is an amazing story when you think of the contributions that he has brought to this country, the ability for him to have that education opportunity here and then have that exported back to a new country—one of the 54 countries of Africa. That is incredible in itself. I also attend on a regular basis with my colleague the member for Pine Rivers the multicultural mass of the Holy Spirit church, and we did last year, didn't we, member for Pine Rivers?

Miss Boyd: We did actually; a local church.

Mr FURNER: That is right; it is a local church. Each August it holds a multicultural mass and it is just wonderful to see the diversity and the backgrounds of the people who come along from different cultures and different countries in their traditional dress. Following the mass there is a traditional feast sampling the traditional foods from their countries. It is just a fantastic experience that we all enjoy. Just this morning Australia surpassed 24 million in population, and approximately four million-plus of that 24 million would be migrants who have come to this country to call Australia home. Earlier I heard the member for Pumicestone talk about Australia Day and citizenship ceremonies. As parliamentarians we are so privileged to have the opportunity to attend those ceremonies. I do not think there is any other event that I can recall where it is so rewarding to see the smiles and the appreciation of migrants who decide on that path and make the decision to become Australian citizens. It is just wonderful.

In my own community and in particular around the shopping centre where my office is situated only a couple of shops away you will find a Vietnamese family in a fish and chip shop and Peter the Indian in the newsagent. It is just a marvellous community when you see the diversity in and around my electorate office. However, I want to refer to the sad contributions that some of our federal colleagues make with regard to attending events like Reclaim Australia, and I directly refer to the federal member for Dawson. He goes along to these events to promote bigotry and is involved in events that are to the demise of multiculturalism in this state. It is of no benefit in terms of this bill and it is of no benefit for anyone if you are going to support those sorts of events and if you are going to encourage people to have a view of bigotry in our community. It goes in complete opposition to this bill. People such as the Prime Minister should condemn those people who go to those events and point out to them that it does nothing to encourage cohesiveness and the multiculturalism that we support as Queensland parliamentarians in our state. I wish people would stand up, particularly the Prime Minister, and ensure that people like the federal member for Dawson discontinue that practice. I commend the bill to the House.