




Speech By  
**Peter Russo**

**MEMBER FOR SUNNYBANK**

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### **MULTICULTURAL RECOGNITION BILL**

 **Mr RUSSO** (Sunnybank—ALP) (4.08 pm): I rise today to speak strongly in favour of the Multicultural Recognition Bill. The purpose of this legislation is to embed the values of multiculturalism and respect for diversity into the fabric of our government and Public Service. This is not only an important symbolic gesture about the government's celebration of multiculturalism but also an integral first step towards making government services more accessible to culturally and linguistically diverse members of society.

The Multicultural Recognition Bill 2015 is another example of the Palaszczuk government's election promise to the people of Queensland to promote Queensland as a harmonious and inclusive community, making Queensland a place where people from overseas who have culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are able to forge a home for themselves and their family.

I am the son of a Sicilian immigrant. My dad came to Australia with his mother when he was eight years of age. My grandfather had come to Australia as an economic refugee some years earlier and worked in the sugar industry in North Queensland. I am proud of the contribution my family has made to the Queensland economy. I am sure that if my grandfather had arrived in Queensland with multicultural recognition legislation in place back in the 1920s his lot in life would have been much easier.

I had the opportunity to sit on the Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee to discuss the potential implementation of this bill and to hear from community stakeholders. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive and many of the contributors welcomed such a bold assertion by the government to foster multiculturalism. The department has described the bill as an important first step towards changing attitudes and increasing public sensitivity to the needs of the culturally and linguistically diverse Australians.

In their submission to the committee, the Refugee Council expressed the hope that these changes will help Queenslanders get to a place where multiculturalism is treated simply as business as usual. Indeed, one of the legislative changes proposed by this bill is the creation of a charter which sets out the aspirations of the Multicultural Queensland Charter. In addition to the Multicultural Queensland Charter, this bill seeks to establish an advisory council to inform the minister directly on multicultural issues and a multicultural policy and action plan for government agencies.

The committee mentioned that 20 per cent of Queenslanders were born overseas. In my electorate, that figure is over 50 per cent. This means that a huge proportion of the population have firsthand experience of arriving and settling into Queensland and I know things could have been made easier for them. This bill seeks to implement a number of standards to ensure that this will now occur. In the early stages of resettlement new arrivals have to interact with government agencies. During my time as state member for Sunnybank, I have had the privilege of interacting with dozens of local volunteer organisations formed to help new Australians settle into Queensland. These organisations

seek to help new arrivals by teaching them language skills and other tools to find gainful employment. With these organisations, the personal interactions are not a one-way street but more of a cultural exchange. Differences in values and cultures are shared and celebrated, and this attitude comes about because the people in my electorate place a high value on a multicultural community. The legislation seeks to encourage this approach on a wider level. These services are delivered with patience and understanding and new arrivals are encouraged to integrate into the community. My electorate is a shining example of the kind of respectful and vibrant culture that can arise from acceptance and celebration of diversity.

I am also told of the hardships that come after the initial settling-in period. During my brief time as the member for Sunnybank the lengths to which my community will go in order to keep their cultural celebrations alive and thriving has made a great impression on me. These organisations and cultural celebrations are an important part of migrants retaining elements of their home country. Just last week I was invited to participate in a range of celebrations to welcome in the Lunar New Year, the Year of the Monkey. I commend the bill to the House.