



Speech By  
**Peter Russo**


**MEMBER FOR SUNNYBANK**

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Record of Proceedings, 25 February 2016

### **PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT**

#### **Australian Unity Centre, Slacks Creek Mosque**

 **Mr RUSSO** (Sunnybank—ALP) (2.40 pm): With the passing of the Multicultural Recognition Bill in this House during the last sitting week, I feel that it is fitting to speak in this House about supporting our multicultural communities and building a collective sense of community. In October 2015 I had the honour of representing the Hon. Shannon Fentiman, the minister for multicultural affairs as she then was, at the opening of the Australian Unity Centre, Slacks Creek Mosque. I was there with the three branches of government: federal, state and local. The opening was well attended by Muslims from all over Queensland as well as many from the local Muslim community, who no doubt will attend the mosque for prayers on Fridays as well as education and support programs that the centre will run for the youth of the area.

I strongly urge members of the 55th Parliament to visit the centre to see the great work and thought that has gone into its establishment. Naming the centre the Australian Unity Centre, Slacks Creek Mosque is significant in itself. It connotes the extension of the hand of friendship to the broader community and invites us all to embrace our community as one. I was there with the honourable Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services, who gave a great speech about a particular street in his electorate which is the home to churches from many different regions. He spoke of the mosaic of culture and spirituality and the collective sense of community in his electorate of Woodridge.

I am honoured to be a friend of the Muslim community. My first significant involvement with the community came about in approximately 2007 when I had the opportunity to represent Dr Mohammed Haneef, who found himself wrongly detained and charged with a terrorism offence. Many of you know that the charge was ultimately dropped, but not before he had spent many days and nights in the Brisbane watch house. I remember at the time how there was a real disconnect between the person I represented and some of our community's understanding of what it meant to be a young Muslim man working here in Australia. It was during my time representing Dr Haneef that I first had the opportunity to meet many members of the Muslim community in Queensland and to engage with them. This was at a time when they felt isolated and confused by the negativity that was being promulgated by the press at the time.