




Speech By
Hon. Shannon Fentiman

MEMBER FOR WATERFORD

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MULTICULTURAL RECOGNITION BILL

 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Communities, Women and Youth, Minister for Child Safety and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence) (4.56 pm): Our government is committed to ensuring that Queensland is a place that welcomes people of all cultural backgrounds and faiths. Along with a proud Indigenous history and heritage, Queensland has a long and prosperous migration history. We have all benefited from this cultural diversity in so many ways. Both our economy and our communities are stronger.

Despite these benefits and opportunities, newly arrived migrants are often disadvantaged in participating in our economy. Although we are a cohesive society, we are still seeing and hearing of some members of our multicultural community who have been discriminated against because of their skin colour, their cultural background or religion. A multicultural Queensland charter and multicultural advisory council for Queensland, as proposed in this bill, will enshrine in legislation our government's commitment to and support of all Queenslanders irrespective of cultural or faith background, because all Queenslanders deserve to be treated as equal members of our society and to live free from discrimination.

I always say that my electorate of Waterford's greatest strength is its multiculturalism. It is a community of diverse and rich cultures. It is a place where traditional owners and Australia's most recent immigrants make their mark. My community is a true multicultural success story. As the local member for Waterford and in my previous role as the minister for multicultural affairs, I had the pleasure and privilege to participate in many community events and meet with many community leaders and organisations who are working hard to benefit our multicultural communities across Queensland.

Ms Grace: And you did a great job.

Ms FENTIMAN: I thank the minister. These events not only showcased the variety and vibrancy within our multicultural society but also provided me with the opportunity to hear from our communities about what matters to them. In my previous role as minister for multicultural affairs, community members, community services and businesses were calling out loud and clear for a multicultural Queensland charter and a multicultural Queensland advisory council.

During the development of this bill, it was an honour to chair the Interim Multicultural Reference Group. With such a wide range of achievements and talents in the group, it was always a pleasure to hear their valuable input as well as feedback from those community groups that took part in the regional consultation on the bill across the state. I strongly believe that actions and policies that have been developed to come out of this bill as well as the principles of the charter will mean that Queensland will lead the way as a united, harmonious and inclusive community.

When I was minister for multicultural affairs, members from Queensland's multicultural communities were extremely welcoming to me as a new minister. They only deserve to be treated with the same openness and respect. They deserve our government to commit in legislation recognition of

our multicultural heritage and support for Queenslanders of diverse cultural and faith backgrounds. Last year, one of my first engagements was celebrating the Lunar New Year. Just one year ago, over the sound of crackling fireworks and the words 'gong xi fa cai', I met members of the Chinese and Taiwanese community, who are working to promote multiculturalism across local communities.

During the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan I was invited into people's homes to break iftar, where I met members of our Muslim community like Murat and Chanan Coskun of East Heritage Park. I would like to again thank them for their generous hospitality and for sharing with me the rich culture and traditions of Ramadan. Of course, I cannot forget the wonderful work of Galila Abdelsalam and Nora Amath from the Islamic Women's Association of Queensland, and the work of Mr Kim Van Lim, a Waterford local and president of the Cambodian Buddhist Association of Queensland and, I might add, a recent winner of a Jim Chalmers MP Local Legends Award. Mr Lim is always organising regular events and fundraisers and always makes sure everyone feels included by making it his mission to share and celebrate his community's culture, customs, religion and history. All of these members of our multicultural community, and many, many more—how can I not forget Elijah Boul, Professor Mohammad Abdullah, Ali Kadri, Sharon Orapeleng, Agnes Whiten, Susan Al-Maani, Josephine Aufai. I could keep going and going. These are wonderful community leaders and activists working towards building Queensland as a harmonious, inclusive, multicultural state and they need support from government. This will be achieved through consultation, through a multicultural advisory council as well as policies created through the action plan.

I have responsibility for a number of portfolios: Communities, Women and Youth, Child Safety and the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence. Across these portfolios my core role is to support vulnerable Queenslanders to improve their lives and that includes those from culturally diverse communities, particularly women, who often face unique challenges when it comes to accessing employment, health care and other social services. This bill will help to strengthen data collection which will allow my department to better target our programs and services to ensure policies, programs and services recognise and respond to Queensland's growing multicultural population.

Last year I hosted a round table of multicultural and multifaith community leaders in Beenleigh to discuss domestic violence. Participants shared their ideas about initiatives that would make a difference in their local communities. One of the biggest issues that came up was lack of relevant data for support services, including court support, counselling and shelters. We know that multicultural community services like Access, MDA, ECCQ and MultiLink do an extraordinary job in helping our most vulnerable multicultural and multifaith communities, but it is vital that government plays its part in supporting these communities too. That is why we must have legislation that recognises and promotes multiculturalism in our state and allows us to provide better access to help for our multicultural communities.

Every single member of this House has a connection to Queensland's proud migration history. Members of this House also have constituents from a number of different cultural backgrounds, from the Philippine community in Bundaberg to the Chilean community in Greenslopes, the African community in Woodridge, the Vietnamese community in Inala and the Chinese and Taiwanese communities in Sunnybank. Last year when I was travelling in regional Queensland I visited Ingham where I joined the member for Hinchinbrook in a heartwarming rendition of *That's Amore* with local nonnas for the local Italian Festival Gala Dinner. It was quite a highlight. This Multicultural Recognition Bill will benefit them all.

Queensland is one of the few Australian jurisdictions that does not have a legislated statement from its parliament recognising our multicultural heritage and committing support for our culturally and linguistically diverse communities. If the member Noosa, who made his contribution earlier this afternoon, thinks that this bill is doing nothing, I say he could not be more wrong. This bill is not just principles based; it will also commit all future Queensland governments to give due respect to our Queensland multicultural society through a whole-of-government multicultural policy and action plan. It will complement existing anti-discrimination legislation such as the Queensland Anti-Discrimination Act and the Australian Racial Discrimination Act. It will provide a strong instrument to strengthen multicultural policy, program development and implementation across government that will support people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to live in communities that are inclusive with equitable access to services and opportunities.

This bill will improve the lives of all Queenslanders. It brings the community together and will deliver real and much needed change across Queensland. Our state has a long and proud tradition of welcoming people into our community regardless of their race or religion. This is a tradition that has been fundamental to Queensland's, and indeed Australia's, success as an open, cohesive and fair society. Our side of the House wants to encourage understanding, cultural exchange and inclusion, not

start a list of those who should be excluded, like the member for Cleveland suggested with his inaccurate and irresponsible comments regarding the presence of sharia law supporting groups in Queensland. Those comments are, in fact, a perfect example of the need for this legislation. I believe that Queensland can, and should, continue to lead the way when it comes to diversity and inclusiveness. I therefore commend the bill to the House.