




Speech By
Christopher Whiting

MEMBER FOR BANCROFT

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ADJOURNMENT

Bancroft Electorate, Samoan Community

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (7.20 pm): One of the things of which I am most proud is that of being a voice for the less powerful in our community. When locals are disadvantaged, when they do not enjoy the same rights and privileges as most of us do, my role is to speak out on their behalf. That is what I am doing tonight. On behalf of the Samoan born residents in my area, I want to talk about the unfair barriers placed upon them by the federal government in becoming citizens.

Most Samoans in my area have come to Australia through New Zealand and those who arrived after 2001 are not eligible for most benefits unless they become citizens. That means they cannot access higher education like uni or housing. In Deception Bay we have many Samoan families who have been living in our community for 20 years or more. They have kids and grandkids who are educated in our local schools. After school too many work in some of the lowest paid and back-breaking jobs in Queensland. I know quite a few of them who work for furniture removalists and others even do cash-in-hand jobs. They cannot afford to go to uni because they are non citizens, meaning they would have to pay full fees to go to uni. To become a citizen they would need to pay thousands of dollars—and in some cases, tens of thousands of dollars—and the process can take a long time, three to five years.

I attend many graduation events at Deception Bay State High School, for example, and I see the most amazing dances and performances by our Samoan born students and their friends; the culture is shared amongst all students at the school. It makes my heart sing to see the joy and pride they have in their culture and they are very unmistakably Deception Bay. The point is that they are enmeshed. Our Samoan families are enmeshed within everyday life in our community.

I will talk about one family. The mother is a citizen and her three children were born in Samoa and came to Australia as teenagers. They were all educated at Deception Bay State High School. Two work for a debt collector. They want to go to uni, but they cannot because they are not citizens. They cannot even do an online course. They cannot get Centrelink payments. Citizenship for that family could cost up to \$30,000. They want to become citizens because this is their home.

I am calling on the federal government and saying that these barriers are preventing families who have been here for decades from becoming citizens. These are my locals. This is their community and this is their home. They have made a commitment to Australia, their extended family is here, their future is here and they are proud Queenslanders. I think it is unfair that the federal government barriers are still in their way.