



Speech By  
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**MEMBER FOR CLEVELAND**

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### **MULTICULTURAL RECOGNITION BILL**

 **Dr ROBINSON** (Cleveland—LNP) (3.58 pm): I rise to address the government's Multicultural Recognition Bill 2015. Queensland is a place with diverse communities and cultures. Queenslanders come from more than 200 different cultural backgrounds. Approximately 20 per cent of the population were born overseas and almost 40 per cent have at least one overseas-born parent. Migrants have shaped the state's multicultural fabric and brought a range of benefits to Queensland society. We have a proud history of immigration in which diverse peoples have come from all over the world, settling into Queensland and becoming Australians and making a wonderful contribution to our society.

Getting to know people of diverse cultures over the years, both in Australia and overseas, has greatly enriched my life. I have had the opportunity to get to know many people who identify as Australians but who come from culturally and religiously diverse backgrounds. Having lived in North Queensland, regional Victoria, Melbourne and South-East Queensland, I have got to know people whose backgrounds are Filipino, Finnish, Italian, Greek, Indian, Indonesian and many others. My teaching days at Townsville TAFE and adult tertiary preparation work at James Cook University in sciences, lecturing in multiculturalism and intercultural communication at private colleges, and tutoring Indigenous students have all helped me to better understand and appreciate people of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

I have had the good fortune of working overseas in short stays in aid and development that has taken me to many Asian countries—places like Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, India, Pakistan, China and more. Building orphanages, working with troubled youth and helping families, among other things, have opened my eyes to the strengths and virtues of other cultures. Exposure to the lifestyles and customs of other people has influenced my values and changed me.

Being involved in postgraduate research in international and Asian studies spanning nine years at the Griffith University's modern Asian studies school and at the University of Queensland's School of Languages and Cultures has also helped enhance my understanding of culture. It has taught me a lot about the importance of culture and working together to build unity while respecting difference. Since 2009, in entering the Queensland parliament, I have had the honour of serving the multicultural community of Cleveland and the broader Redlands. Whether at citizenship ceremonies or at their local businesses or just talking with people down the main street of Cleveland, I have experienced the cultural diversity of Australia. Serving on the executive committee of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association also afforded me the opportunity to meet with people from all over the Commonwealth—people from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Europe.

Here in Queensland today we are truly blessed to have thriving multicultural communities in Brisbane, including Cleveland and the Redlands. Migrant families have come to Queensland for various reasons and under various circumstances. These people have become Australians and at the same

time have preserved aspects of their language and culture from the lands of origin that are important to them. In some cases they are now second- and third-generation Australians and quite unique in their Australian identity. Australians, by and large, have been receptive and embracing to new cultures. With exceptions, we have been sensitive and compassionate towards individuals from other cultures.

Today we have before us the Multicultural Recognition Bill, which has three main elements. The first is the Multicultural Queensland Charter, which aims to recognise the contribution of Queenslanders from diverse backgrounds and promote Queensland as a united, harmonious and inclusive community. The second is the Multicultural Queensland Advisory Council, which will advise the minister on multicultural issues and consult with culturally and linguistically diverse communities and other interest groups. The third is the multicultural policy and multicultural action plan with associated implementation and reporting requirements for government entities.

I will spend a few moments on the Multicultural Queensland Advisory Council. This council is a welcome initiative that can only improve the communication and understanding between diverse groups and government. While already strong lines of communication exist between ethnic communities, the parliament and members of parliament, this measure, if operated effectively, will improve the relationships and should improve the provision of state government services to ethnic communities.

In terms of multiculturalism in Australia, an important thing to consider is that culture is dynamic and thus changes over time. The interaction of peoples of diverse cultures can be a good thing and can promote harmony and inclusion. Generally people of diverse ethnic backgrounds grow together and positively influence and change each other for the better. Under the banner of multiculturalism, Australia has become a better place to live in as each culture has integrated into Australian society and brought its own strengths to bear. However, there is also the potential for there to be confusion and conflict under the same banner. Harmful differences can emerge if there is not sufficient integration, agreement or unity about what values should be held in common. Multiculturalism does not automatically work; it must have common vision and commitment from diverse groups to work towards those common Australian values.

The vast majority of Australians accept that we are a multicultural society and accept that we have a multicultural future. As we consider what multiculturalism should be in the future, I suggest that it should have as a starting point the Judaeo-Christian heritage that underpins the value systems and institutions of our nation. The Judaeo-Christian ethic has provided the platform upon which our Australian culture has been built. This ethical framework has provided unity, harmony and an inclusive secularism. As we look to the future of our multicultural nation, we should not reject or move far from the values and virtues that have underpinned our success.

The bill states that there is a need for balanced gender representation in the membership of the council. I agree that there does need to be balance with respect to gender. I also believe there needs to be a similar balance in the membership between the main cultural groups who live in Queensland. That will not be an easy feat, but I believe it is important. Another area of balance needs to be with respect to religious representation. While the bill is about multiculturalism, it does include religious groups or the potential for religious groups to be represented. Religious groups can be represented on the council and, for example, the Islamic Council of Queensland is mentioned.

I want to make a few points about religious representation within a spirit of acceptance. Firstly, if the government is going to include religious representation, I suggest that it should have equal representation of the main religious groups in Queensland. Secondly, there should be clear selection criteria to guide the minister in their selection of people from diverse religious groups. The Islamic Council of Queensland has been mentioned as a potential member, but what about more radical Islamic groups or Islamic groups that follow sharia law? I have some concerns around groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir, which is a radical pan-Islamic political organisation with the aim of establishing an Islamic state or caliphate that would be ruled by Islamic sharia law. I do not believe that Australians want to provide any recognition to that type of Islamic ideology because it is in stark contrast to our Australian values of freedom and democracy.

In September 2014 ASIO raised the national terrorist alert level to high, where it has remained. According to federal Attorney-General Senator George Brandis, since that time Australia has suffered three lethal terrorist attacks and we have thwarted another six. These attacks have originated from the infiltration of radical fundamentalist sharia forms of Islam into our nation. As a parliament, we must embrace multiculturalism while at the same time protecting Queenslanders from real threats. So I ask the minister: what are the criteria for deciding which Islamic organisations will receive official recognition and be invited to be represented on the advisory council? There does not seem to be any clear criteria. In my view, the minister should rule out all Islamic organisations that support sharia law from having any official recognition.

I believe we have a bright multicultural future in Queensland, as we continue to build on our Judaeo-Christian values that have made our nation strong. We need to be a tolerant and compassionate society, embracing the culture of others in our communities as they integrate and become Australians.