

Speech notes – Forum Multicultural Recognition Act

Date and time of event: Wednesday 8 June 1:35pm

Location: USQ Refectory

Welcome Speech by Mayor Paul Antonio

Acknowledge:

I want to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today, the Jarrowir and Giabel people.

Uncle Darby McCarthy

Professor Jan Thomas, Vice-Chancellor and President – University of Southern Queensland

Mr Wayne Briscoe, Executive Director, Stakeholder Engagement and Communication, Department of Communities, Child Safety, Disability Services

Ms Julie McDougall – Director Multicultural Affairs Queensland.

Thanks for the invitation to be here – this Act is certainly very significant for our state, and as a region that is proudly multi-cultural, we welcome its sentiments very much.

I particularly note the first two points of the Act ...because they capture what we have been working to achieve here in Toowoomba for some time:

- to recognise the valuable contribution of diverse groups of people to the Queensland community; and
- to promote Queensland as a unified, harmonious and inclusive community by establishing the multicultural charter;
- Our nation was built on the back of migration and continues to prosper both economically and socially from our increasingly diverse populations... This Act acknowledges this... and makes a commitment to honouring that fact.
- Our Toowoomba region, is a rich tapestry of different cultures that come together to create our collective and unique Australian and regional culture.
- From the first peoples who came across southern Queensland to the Bunya Festivals, this region has been a place where languages and cultures meet.
- From the Chinese shepherds to the Irish Railways workers, the Scottish and German farmers, they have all found a place to call home in the Toowoomba region...
- In more recent times we have welcomed people from Asia, the Middle East and parts of Africa.
- The Australian story and character is one of transformation, perseverance, re-invention, acceptance and above all a healthy dose of challenging the status quo.

- Our unique story evolves from convict beginnings, daring and desperate exploration to visionary expansion and battles against the elements.
- The image of the drover, shearer, jackeroo and isolated, pioneer woman survives to this day, much like the lifesaver, military personnel and pioneers of the Flying Doctor and School of the Air.
- We owe much to our forebears...
- They form part of the rich tradition that we hold dear.
- But that rich tradition...that unique Australian culture.... is underpinned by egalitarianism, a sense of the 'fair-go', of looking out for each-other, and offering a hand up to those who need it.
- We have seen these qualities come to the fore throughout our history.
- Whether in responding to natural disasters, to times of unrest beyond our shores, or simply in the way good people go about their lives in wonderful communities across our vast landscape, it's these attributes that makes who we are.
- And, ladies and gentlemen... if we want to maintain what makes us unique, to go on giving everyone a 'fair-go' to keep 'looking out for each-other' and offering a hand up to those who need it... we need to be honest with ourselves about what that means.
- That means seeing other Australians only as fellow human beings, all walking on the same journey.
- It means regardless of someone's race, religion, background, or social status that we all acknowledge there is space for them to become part of our Australian story and our region's story.
- Of course, there are responsibilities for all of us who call this place home.
- It's a two-way street...but we all have the same basic human needs and desires: to live in peace, to be able to provide for the needs of our families and to enjoy this amazing life we've been given.
- Never forget that... by each of us as individuals upholding and indeed sharing...what it means to be Australian we spread the message to all that we meet...
I believe we do this better than most here in the Toowoomba region.
- We are a community that cares about itself and we work together to make our part of the world even better.
- Therefore I thank the State Government for enacting this important piece of legislation..

Thanks also to USQ, William and to Gitie for bringing this event together... and indeed... to all those in our region who continually work, often behind the scenes, to make sure our cultural diversity is valued and celebrated.

- I will close today with a quote...of which the origin is unknown.
- **Regardless of our differences,...we are all the same!**