

**Submission
No 15**

**ADMINISTRATION OF THE 2023 NSW STATE ELECTION AND OTHER
MATTERS**

Organisation: Ethnic Communities' Council of NSW

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Joint Standing Committee on Electoral
Matters. NSW Parliament.

Inquiry into the Administration of the
2023 NSW State elections and other
matters.

**Submission of Ethnic Communities'
Council of New South Wales**

February 2024

The Ethnic Communities Council of NSW (ECCNSW) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, conducting an inquiry into the administration of the 2023 State elections and other matters.

The ECCNSW is the State-wide peak body representing culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. Our membership comprises of hundreds of organisations and individuals representing new, emerging and established communities; our core activities include advocacy, education and community development.

The ECCNSW is writing this submission to share with the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters the consistent results and findings of the 'Vote Talk' Project we delivered in partnership with the NSW Electoral Commission (NSWEC) in 2023.

The 'Vote Talk' Project is an innovative initiative designed by the ECCNSW to assist culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities to better understand how they can actively participate in, and make informed decisions about, voting during election processes in Australia. It has been a well-recognised and valuable partnership between ECCNSW, AEC and NSWEC and demonstrates the benefits and achievements when three agencies are provided the opportunity to work collaboratively.

In 2023 the NSW Electoral Commission approached ECCNSW to facilitate the *Vote Talk* Program for the 2023 State elections. By delivering engaging and culturally appropriate educational information to culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups in their own language we aimed to assist and address the cultural & language barriers that hindered electoral participation and voting responsibilities.

At the conclusion of this project a formal *Vote Talk* Program Evaluation Report was submitted to the NSW Electoral Commission. The Report summarised the significance of the project, in its capacity to outreach to those of CALD backgrounds who are eligible to vote in the State elections, and ensure they have equal access to democratic processes.

THE VOTE TALK MODEL

The Program delivered in 2023 is comprised of three components:

1. Community Education and Engagement.
2. Bilingual Café Conversations; and,
3. Live 'on air' ethnic radio broadcasts.

All components harnessed the power of ethnic radio, and demonstrated the strength of "in language" delivery to communities via the ECCNSW's bilingual facilitator.

The training of the bilingual educators was a critical element of the *Vote Talk* Program. The Program used a “cascading training” approach whereby the ECCNSW bilingual facilitators were trained to deliver key messages relating to enrolment, voting, and working at elections. This enabled communities to hear information in their community language from a trusted community source and influence change within their communities.

We recommend that any future training continues to ensure that bilingual facilitators sign a confidentiality and neutrality disclaimer, by agreeing to respect the strict political neutrality of the NSWEC with the understanding they would not knowingly associate the *Vote Talk* Program, the NSW Electoral Commission or their own views with any political policy or candidate involved in the election.

IMPLEMENTATION

The purpose of these Program components is to increase electoral awareness, electoral enrolments, and voting formality rates of people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds living in New South Wales.

A total of six language groups across Western Sydney were targeted in 2023.

Arabic, Cantonese, Greek, Korean , Mandarin , Vietnamese.

The languages were selected by the NSW Electoral Commission based on the data available indicating low English language proficiency rates, and feedback from the sector regarding high priority groups.

1. Community Education and Engagement

On completion of the training the Bilingual Facilitators coordinated and delivered targeted education to the CALD communities, and front line community leaders and staff. These engagements were in local libraries, community auditoriums, at community events, places of worship community halls.

2. Bilingual Café Conversations

The purpose of the Café Conversation is to scope and record community attitudes and responses towards voting and election processes. As these conversations evolved, the bilingual facilitators where applicable, intervened by providing accurate information with the aim of dispelling any misconceptions which could affect the result of a formal vote. These Café Conversations were recorded in the targeted six languages and edited via the *Vote Talk* Quality Assurance Checking Processes before being disseminated to the public. Live ‘on air’ ethnic radio broadcasts

3. Live 'on air' ethnic radio broadcasts

Leading up to the NSW State elections, the ECCNSW bilingual facilitators contacted their respective ethnic radio stations to secure recording times with radio hosts. The scripts for both the bilingual facilitators and radio hosts were developed in consultation with NSW Electoral Commission and were provided along with guides on how to facilitate on air discussion themes in the targeted languages.

Depending on the radio hosts protocols, the *Vote Talk* conversations on air were recorded and repeated several times throughout the week and were freely available on the radio channels online platforms, for communities to access at their convenience, as a lead up to the next recording.

This repetition was highly successful as it provided ample time for listeners to hear, understand and become familiar with the messages before it was replaced with the next recorded on air conversations.

***Vote Talk* Resources**

In consultation with the NSW Electoral Commission, several resources were developed for the *Vote Talk* Program by the ECCNSW. These materials were used in conjunction with the *Vote Talk* Training Handbook, which provided guidance to the bilingual facilitators on how their newly acquired interviewing techniques and skills could be applied to make the most of their engagements, Café Conversations, and the on-air radio broadcasts. As a result, the bilingual facilitators were able to challenge preconceived ideas of any negative perceptions of voting and election processes across the State.

INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- The *Vote Talk* Café Conversations and educational workshops were incredibly effective and valuable. Many expressed that they were unaware of absent voting and early voting options and expressed greater confidence on how to complete their ballot paper.
- Younger people expressed being inspired and requested further information on how they could access their local Members of Parliament.
- Scripting as delivered in the *Vote Talk* Program remains a crucial element of the Program. These not only provided a guide to the on air delivery, but enabled key information and messages in simple easy steps that could be understood by the listener.
- Funding of the *Vote Talk* Program during the Federal, State and Local elections to address the new cohorts of migrants and refugees settling

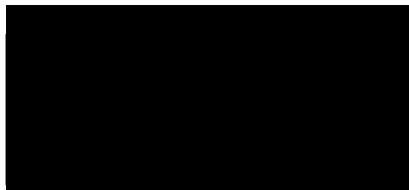
in Australia would be the ideal approach, as this is not a “one off” project.

- ECCNSW Bilingual facilitators were the backbone of this Program. Recruitment of bilingual facilitators for any external future delivery of the *Vote Talk* Program will require an induction using previous podcasts and resources developed that demonstrate how the on air interviews, the Café Conversations and community engagement sessions should be conducted.
- A more comprehensive marketing and communications strategy would ensure an increase in the Program’s exposure in the future. Considerations could be given for extending the Program to other States though the Ethnic Communities Councils/Multicultural Communities Councils that would allow for a national platform.
- Training was a high satisfaction rate. Consider incorporating sessions into universities targeting first year students who may be unaware of the voting processes, and to the NSW Department of Education’s Senior Curriculum.

We are available should you seek any clarification or have any queries regarding our submission or further to the above.

Please note that quantitative and qualitative data from the *Vote Talk* Program delivered by Ethnic Communities Council of NSW for the State elections in 2023 has been submitted in the *Vote Talk* Report held by the NSW Electoral Committee.

Yours,



Peter Doukas OAM

CHAIR

Ethnic Communities Council of NSW.