

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 1

INQUIRY INTO MULTICULTURALISM

At Sydney on Tuesday 9 May 2000

The Committee met at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT

Reverend the Hon. F. J. Nile (Chair)
The Hon. D. F. Moppett
The Hon. P. T. Primrose
The Hon. J. M. Samios
The Hon. H. S. Tsang
The Hon. P. Wong

This is a privileged document published by the Authority of the Committee under the provisions of Section 4 (2) of the *Parliamentary Papers (Supplementary Provisions) Act 1975*.

CHAIR: I welcome the media and members of the public to this hearing of General Purpose Standing Committee No. 1 for its inquiry into multiculturalism. Members of the media: I advise that, under Standing Order No. 252 of the Legislative Council, evidence given before the Committee and any documents presented to the Committee that have not yet been tabled in Parliament "may not, except with the permission of the Committee, be disclosed or published by any Member of such Committee or by any other person". Copies of guidelines governing broadcast of the proceedings are available from the table by the door.

NEVILLE JOSEPH ROACH, Chairman, Council for Multicultural Australia, Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, PO Box 25 Belconnen, Australian Capital Territory, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: In what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Mr ROACH: As Chairman of the Council for Multicultural Australia.

CHAIR: Did you receive a summons issued under my hand in accordance with the provisions of the Parliamentary Evidence Act 1901?

Mr ROACH: Yes, I did.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Mr ROACH: Yes, I am.

CHAIR: The Committee has your submission. Do you wish to make an opening statement?

Mr ROACH: I would like to make a very brief opening statement and then rely on questions. Firstly, I would like to thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak to this inquiry. I think it is an extremely important inquiry. The issue of multiculturalism is a very important issue for Australia as a whole. Within Australia New South Wales, whoever may like it or not, is clearly the pacesetter and the leader. Australia cannot achieve much unless New South Wales is in step, and in fact quite often providing the leadership. Therefore I believe that this inquiry is extremely important, not only for New South Wales but also for Australia as a whole.

The Council for Multicultural Australia was formed in response to a report that was produced by a previous council, called the National Multicultural Advisory Council. The Hon. Dr P. Wong was a member of that advisory council. Our recommendations were accepted in their entirety by the Federal Government, and as a result a new council was established. That council reports not only to the Minister but also to the Prime Minister. At present we have a very strong endorsement of Australian multiculturalism by the Federal Government.

The biggest recommendation that we made was that to go forward multiculturalism needs to be inclusive. "Towards inclusiveness" was the title of our report. By that we meant that we need to include both the indigenous community, with a strong focus on reconciliation, as well as the majority community whose origins are Great Britain and Ireland. Any exclusion of either of these two groups makes multiculturalism basically a nonsense. It is about all Australians, it is about Australian culture and Australian identity, and it builds on everything that all of us have brought to the table when we arrived in Australia, whether by birth or migration.

The other major recommendation that we have made or asked for is political consensus—that is, not only bipartisan support but cross-party support. As a test we have suggested that in our view all parties that can subscribe to the race resolution in the Parliament of Australia in October 1996 are parties that are legitimate in terms of their attitudes to racism and multiculturalism and are therefore worthy of collaboration, and we would like to see all of these parties working together.

The reason we are stressing that is the concern we have that subjects like multiculturalism are fundamental and go to the core of community harmony. If we have a traditional, robust, adversarial debate, quite often this can do damage to the fabric of society. I am not questioning the value of robust debate and the benefits that that brings to Australia in terms of our democratic system, which is paramount. However, it would be nice if issues such as multiculturalism could strive for cross-party consensus so that we give leadership to the community and do not give comfort to those who might have a vested interest or negative attitudes towards community harmony, and certainly towards multiculturalism.

With regard to the inquiry itself and its terms of reference, we made a response to the Government's initial inquiry or discussion paper that was put out, and I also made a response to your standing committee. The basic thrust of our response and my submission today is that we welcome the bill in principle. We believe that there are some very, very powerful and valuable components of that bill, particularly the enshrinement in legislation of the principles of multiculturalism. We believe that the ability of the proposed commission to do, independent of the Minister, an audit of compliance with the principles of multiculturalism is a very powerful step forward, and in fact in a sense is pacesetting within Australia and perhaps in some ways internationally as well.

We realise, of course, that the most difficult issue that has been continually discussed since this bill was initially mooted is the issue of terminology. In my view—at this stage the council consists of only one person, so in that sense I can say it is also currently the council's view—terminology is extremely important. It has a very strong symbolic and emotive impact, and we should take terminology very seriously. In the case of our own council, we recommended the continued use of the word "multiculturalism". That was the term that was highly controversial at the time. We unanimously recommended that, and the Government has fully accepted that. We have suggested that the term be prefixed wherever possible with the term "Australian", because we strongly believe that what we are talking about is Australian multiculturalism, which is quite different from multiculturalism in the United Kingdom, Canada, America or New Zealand. It is our own unique implementation, our own unique achievement, and in terms of inclusiveness all of us should be proud of it and celebrate it and go forward with it.

I do not want to suggest that I do not think terminology is extremely important. Had we not resolved that issue quickly, I think we might have had the debate still continuing in the community, and that would have been doing serious damage. Having said that, however, I believe that once terminology is resolved, then of course you have to go forward with the substance. In the end, whether or not our council—either the advisory council or the new council—achieves something of real and lasting benefit to Australia will depend on the work that we do in going forward in the implementation of the agenda.

In the case of New South Wales, the issue of the new name proposed for the Ethnic Affairs Commission, namely the Community Relations Commission, has become an issue of significant controversy within Parliament, the media and the community. My own personal view is that the best outcome would be for the commission to reflect the intent of its work, which is a multicultural intent. I definitely support the dropping of the term "ethnic". I believe it has served its purpose. In our council, which Peter Wong was part of, we looked at the term "ethnic" and we felt that it was not an inclusive term. By definition, the way the term has been used in Australia has been to exclude people from an English-speaking background, which in Australia means the majority of the people. We believe that everyone is ethnic in one form or another, and people of an English-speaking background are ethnics

of an English-speaking background. However, in the usage that the term has developed in our community, it has lost that meaning. So it is not an inclusive term, although I understand from the Hon. J. M. Samios that when it was first mooted and first used the intention was that it be inclusive.

I believe that moving away from that term is a very good idea. However, it would be nice if the term "multicultural" were included in the name of the commission. Of course, the word "multiculturalism" is enshrined within the Act as amended and the Government did respond to the submissions that it received by in fact strengthening the bill by referring right throughout the bill to the term "multiculturalism". Therefore, there is no question that anyone who reads the bill will understand what it is all about. Most people, of course, do not read the bill but simply look at the superficial impression or image that they get.

However, in my view it is an issue that in the end is a secondary issue. It has to be resolved, and it should be resolved quickly. The longer it takes to be resolved, the more damage it is doing to the cause of multiculturalism. The only people who receive comfort from that are the intolerant people in our community. Considering that, and considering the feedback that I have had that the Government was unlikely to change its view on the naming of the commission, I wrote to the Premier—and a copy of that letter is attached to the council's submission—urging him to consider presenting the commission to the public with the term "multicultural" included within its title.

In my view, as a businessman, in the end terminology is a matter of marketing, promotion, image, branding—all those things. These may sound too crass for such a big issue but fundamentally that is what we are trying to do, trying to influence the community. Therefore, we should look at all the opportunities the commission have to present itself to the public, its customers, its clients, and to lead the whole community in its area of responsibility. My suggestion was if it could not be put into the bill itself and the name of the commission in a legal sense, the Premier should at least agree that wherever the commission presented itself, whether it was in the media, in its business guides, its letterheads, its promotional brochures, flyers and posters, everything it did, it should refer to itself as the Community Relations Commission for Multicultural New South Wales. I use the term "for Multicultural New South Wales" to parallel the name the Federal Government has given to the national council, which is the Council for Multicultural Australia. So, it follows that same concept.

I strongly urge everyone involved to consider that proposal. I made that proposal to the Ethnic Communities Council and it is considering it. A number of ethnic community councils have between them decided they want to support exactly that. The Premier has responded to my suggestion and has accepted it and has, I think, issued a press release stating he has accepted this concept. I understand the Ethnic Affairs Commission is extremely comfortable with that idea. I know it is not the best possible outcome but I believe it is a sufficiently good outcome to allow us to move forward and focus on the main game, which is looking after the rights of communities that need support, looking after the development of community harmony, going forward as a united multicultural New South Wales and, as I said earlier, leading Australia in the direction.

So, I strongly urge you, Mr Chairman, and your colleagues to consider that proposal. I believe, like everything, it may not be everything that all members would wish for, however I think it would allow us to move forward. If we do not move forward, I have to say that while these issues are in a state of limbo or are seen to be in a state of dispute, we are not benefiting the cause of multiculturalism and the people who do not like multiculturalism will say, "Look at all these people who support multiculturalism—the Labor Party, the Coalition, the Democrats, the Independents—they cannot even agree on something as simple as this. Doesn't it show that diversity is divisive?" That is the biggest concern I have. So, I urge you to take the high ground, accept that there are strong opinions on this issue. The primary objective the Government has is inclusiveness, which is why it wanted to move away from the word "ethnic". The inclusiveness is essential, and I believe the suggestion I have made and which the Premier is happy to proceed with does resolve the issue. There is nothing to say that over

time it cannot be revisited, but if that issue is going to hold up the passage of the bill, I cannot see that the community is well served. Thank you.

CHAIR: I note that in your submission you referred to the document you put out from your organisation, "A New Agenda for Multicultural Australia". Will you table that?

Mr ROACH: Yes, both. You have the other one too, which is the original report.

CHAIR: For the record, as it is so critical to this debate, your first recommendation was to adopt the definition of multiculturalism in that document?

Mr ROACH: Yes.

CHAIR: Would you just put on the record what that definition is, so it is recorded in *Hansard*.

Mr ROACH: Sure. It is:

Australian multiculturalism ... is a term which recognises and celebrates Australia's cultural diversity. It accepts and respects the right of all Australians to express and share their individual cultural heritage within an overriding commitment to Australia and the basic structures and values of Australian democracy. It also refers specifically to the strategies, policies and programs that are designed to:

make our administrative, social and economic infrastructure more responsive to the rights, obligations and needs of our culturally diverse population;

promote social harmony among the different cultural groups in our society; and

optimise the benefits of our cultural diversity for all Australians.

CHAIR: That is a bit more than a definition, is it not?

Mr ROACH: Well, we use it. In the strict terms of the science of logic, I suppose it is more of a description but basically we are saying it moves away from assimilation and integration. It says difference is okay, difference is good, difference should be celebrated, but it is also the umbrella policy under which we manage our culturally diverse society.

CHAIR: I was asking you that because in the bill I cannot see a definition of multiculturalism. There are principles of multiculturalism.

Mr ROACH: Yes.

CHAIR: And under the heading of definitions multiculturalism does not appear. Do you think it should be stated?

Mr ROACH: I recommended that it be used, and to the extent that it can take note of what the Federal Government has accepted I think it would be nice if that was considered seriously.

CHAIR: So it gives us a common ground, we are all discussing the same thing?

Mr ROACH: Exactly, yes. It has been well received in the academic world, where the researchers and scholars rigorously analyse these things. It is a valuable step forward.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Mr Roach, first of all, allow me to commend you for trying to find a solution to this issue by at least coming up with the by-line, as it were, "Community Relations Commission for Multicultural New South Wales", or, alternatively, you say "Commission for Community Relations in Multicultural New South Wales". I think that is a positive step in the right direction, but I would put it to you that it is not as effective as inserting the word "multicultural" in the name itself. You agree with that?

Mr ROACH: I agree. I did say the best outcome would be that. To me, this is an acceptable, serviceable outcome. My suggestion is an acceptable, serviceable outcome, it is not the best outcome.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: But from your point view as chairman of this important Federal body, would you not say that having the word "multicultural" in the name, in the core of the name, is important to the broad mass of the clientele?

Mr ROACH: I would say it is important, but I wouldn't say it is essential.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Not essential?

Mr ROACH: No.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: As a businessman, a marketing man, is it not essential when you set up a structure to identify that structure very clearly? For example, if we are talking about the wheat industry, the board that is dealing with it is the Wheat Board, it is not a community board.

Mr ROACH: It is an extremely interesting question, and as a businessman I would have to say it is quite easy to argue the case for either approach. Branding is what, in the end, it is all about. For example, with some companies that derived their names for whatever reason in the past, it is very difficult to know what that name has to do with what they are doing today. It is not just the reinvention of mining companies as dot com companies, but other major companies. NCR was National Cash Register. Today, it is not National Cash Registers, it is just NCR. From the name you do not know obviously, it is only through their promotion, through their branding, through their advertising that people get to know what that name is about. IBM seldom uses the name International Business Machines anymore, it is just IBM. Fujitsu is the name of Furukawa, Siemens, Tsushinki, which is telecommunications. Nobody knows that is what it stands for.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: It may be that business operates in a different way, but from your experience as chairman, would you not say that it is important that people from non-English-speaking backgrounds that need basic services access immediately the appropriate structure by having a clear, identifiable name?

Mr ROACH: Yes, and I believe that would be served by everything that the commission does and every communication that the commission makes, making it clear that it is for multicultural New South Wales. So that everybody who receives any document from the commission, sees any literature from the commission, sees any promotional material from the commission would see that.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: To start with, Mr Chairman, through you, I thank Neville Roach for being here today. I know he genuinely tries to solve this problem. It is not easy. I know he genuinely believes that a better word in the name would be "multicultural", which has been mentioned many times. I would like to quote the conclusion of the council in an earlier submission during the consultation process that was contained in a letter of 13 August 1999. Mr Roach said:

In conclusion, the Council strongly urges that the names of the Commission and the portfolio, include the term "multicultural" or "multiculturalism" in order to maximise the development

and promotion of an inclusive society in a way that supports a national approach as well as political consensus.

He concluded by saying:

This is, therefore, a great opportunity for the Premier and the Minister to show statesmanship by making a small concession that will earn the enormous goodwill and promote the progress of New South Wales and Australia to a more inclusive and harmonious multicultural community...

Are you happy with that statement?

Mr ROACH: Yes, I am happy with that statement. This was the response to the Government's discussion paper, which invited comment on the draft bill.

CHAIR: Are you saying that since that time you have made concessions?

Mr ROACH: At that time that was our submission. I still say, as I have said here, that I think that would be the best outcome. I am also being a pragmatic person and looking at the consequence of a stalemate.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: Mr Chairman—

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Can I finish the question? I have 15 minutes at least. The Hon. H. S. Tsang can ask as many questions as he wants afterwards. This frequently happens to my questions.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: I just want some background.

CHAIR: Yes. Otherwise it could sound as if Mr Roach is making that statement today.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: I said that it was a previous statement and I did quote the date.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: Mr Chairman, can I also state that since that statement was made the Government has made concessions—

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Mr Chairman, he is making a statement.

CHAIR: I ask the Hon. Dr P. Wong to ask his next question.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: I sincerely thank you for what you are trying to do. I am concerned that in your submission one reason, and correct me if I am wrong, that leads you to make such a proposal was that you state clearly the concern about the name "Committee Relations Commission" as follows:

I believe this concern is what the Opposition and minority parties in the Legislative Council are relying on to deny the passage of the bill.

Could you elaborate? Who has informed you that the Opposition and the minority parties are going to deny the passage of the bill?

Mr ROACH: No-one in particular has informed me. I was just talking about my general impression from discussion and debate that was taking place within ethnic communities, the media and so on. As I said, it is just my belief. I cannot attribute it to any particular individual.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: That is what happened yesterday with a witness. There were things based on rumours and therefore they suggested a compromise. Is it not unfortunate that your statement happens to be untrue and you are uncomfortable wavering from that statement?

Mr ROACH: As I said, this subject has been discussed in so many different forums, meetings, receptions and launching of reports. That belief was something I reached based on all those conversations. No individual or group has particularly influenced me. Perhaps the word "belief" was too strong. My strong impression

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: But purely hearsay?

Mr ROACH: A little more than hearsay. Of course, you can correct me because now I am getting feedback directly from the people involved and if that is not the case, I welcome that. If the bill can be passed without that change or a change similar to what I have suggested, I would be delighted.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: According to your consultation submission to the Ethnic Affairs Commission you said:

Regarding citizenship, the council believes the term is in a general meaning rather than the specific legal status of Australian citizenship. It is a powerful term signifying membership of the Australian community. However, it is unqualified. It runs the risk of confusion between the general and legal meaning. The latter, of course, being a Federal rather than State authority responsibility. Again, the word "multiculturalism" could be added and would add value without detracting in any way from the intent implied in the term "citizenship". Hence, we would prefer the portfolio be named "Multiculturalism and Citizenship" or "Citizenship and Multiculturalism".

Are you still happy with that?

Mr ROACH: Yes, very much. But that relates to the portfolio. It is a different issue from the bill.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Do you agree that if a Minister's title included "citizenship" that it virtually implies it has a legalistic meaning? For example, if somebody called themselves Minister for Citizenship, it implied a legal status and not a literacy status?

Mr ROACH: I think there is a risk of that misunderstanding, yes.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: I fully agree with you. Therefore, a better term would be "citizenship and multiculturalism" or "multiculturalism and citizenship"?

Mr ROACH: Very much so. As you know, in our report we clearly distinguish between what we called large C or Australian Citizenship, and again we use the words "Australian Citizenship" as often as possible with capital letters to make sure we are talking about the legal definition. When we talk of citizenship with a small C, as it is often used, particularly in a political science sense, we are talking of membership of the community, which might include Australian citizens as well as, in our view, permanent residents, that is, people who have the right to be part of our community.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Previous speakers have expressed concern, and you may wish to comment, that in the interview there is much mention about responsibility of being a citizen—little C, I presume—overarching commitment to Australia without mentioning too much about the rights of

such citizens. Do you wish to comment on that? The interview mentioned a lot about responsibility and commitment to Australia.

Mr ROACH: Who?

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: The Community Relations Commission talking about the multiculturalism view. I will put it another way. Do you think we should usurp the rights of such citizens?

Mr ROACH: I think membership of any community includes rights as well as responsibilities. As you know, again with our council we went out of our way to stress that because we were concerned that some people against multiculturalism felt there was too much focus on rights and not enough on responsibility. In other words, minorities might not be loyal to Australia. You and I know that that is ridiculous; minorities are very loyal to Australia. But we felt it would be good in our document to stress both rights and responsibilities. Any discussion on this subject should stress both rights and responsibilities. My reading of the bill was that it did lead to both of those things, but if you are suggesting to me that it does not state the rights strongly enough, I would certainly support strengthening that. It is important to continually stress both rights and responsibilities.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: I express my thanks to Neville for the work he has done federally and for the committee. We work well together on many issues. His opinions are very valued by a lot of people from all backgrounds. The Chairman of the Ethnic Affairs Commission expressed a view that content is important, as we all agree. Indeed, this bill is self-explanatory in its content and I appreciate your support of it. He said that the name of the commission needs to be more inclusive so that it is workable. He also endorsed your recommendation that "Community Relations for Multiculturalism" is a workable one and he can market it to be inclusive of all communities. There was a proposition of some other names, which I think the commissioner may or may not find marketable or easier, that is, "Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship Commission" and the other suggestion was "Multicultural Affairs and Community Relations Commission". Do you think the name proposed by you compared with those two suggestions are markedly different or are the two proposals I have just mentioned much better for marketing or for it to be able to function with its new powers and obligations to serve the community?

Mr ROACH: It depends on how the commission operates and how the Government and Parliament operate in relation to it. Names are important but in the end it is what is behind those names and the behaviour that really count. Any of those variations in my view are roughly equal. The big distinction between the two views, I suppose, is that one is enshrining it in legislation so that that is its legal and registered name and the other is that its registered name remains "Community Relations Commission" but you add to it a term that makes it clear what its thrust is. Companies debate and argue all the time about slogans and business names. That is one of the biggest areas of argument. In the end someone can have a perfect name but not promote multiculturalism at all, or it could have an adequate name, which is what I am proposing, and promote it effectively. The real issue then is under the supervision of Parliament how that commission operates. To me, the fact that the legislation makes it clear what its role is, gives us the comfort that Parliament can always make sure that they do the right thing.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: Are you saying that for a commission to function properly and for the community to receive the benefit of a condition that works well it needs the support of the Parliament?

Mr ROACH: Very much so.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: Which will oversee the Act?

Mr ROACH: Yes.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: It needs also the goodwill of the Executive Government so that it actually budgets and does everything for it. Therefore, your proposal, as I detect it, as the name for multiculturalism in New South Wales will allow goodwill and give the Executive Government a chance to perform. In a sense, you are not agreeing that it is an equally good name, because you feel threatened—

Mr ROACH: Not at all.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: — or are being coerced to believe the bill will be stopped, but you are doing it as a goodwill, so to speak, to encourage goodwill of the Executive Government and allow Parliament to see it?

Mr ROACH: The Executive Government is obviously important. It is the elected Government and has carriage over the administration of the State, but very close behind the goodwill of the Executive Government is the goodwill of the whole Parliament, which includes other parties, that is, the Coalition, the Australian Democrats, the Greens, Unity, and the Independents—I will not mention one party. All of them together should have consensus on issues like this. We need the goodwill of them all, but clearly the Executive Government is entrusted with primary responsibility for management of the State. Therefore, without its support nothing can really function.

CHAIR: To clarify a point: The word "marketing" was used earlier, but perhaps there should be an education program, once the bill is passed, to inform ethnic communities and the wider communities of the role of the commission and what it seeks to do?

Mr ROACH: Absolutely. I believe that it is a continuous process. I believe education is a better word than marketing promotion because the latter can have some sort of crass connotation. The people who need to be educated are especially those who work for the commission. Every training course, introduction and application they make should always push this concept.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: As a businessman, I ask you to comment on what I believe be a parallel with the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank which came to Australia. It is the fourth largest bank and markets whatever it does. It marketed to capture the support of the Hong Kong people. It has recently changed to HKSB, and in so doing it serves the larger community. The name HKSB does not mean anything, but the bank spends money on education and promotion. If the Government were to support the promotion of the name change, perhaps it could be as effective as HKSB. By marketing the business name to a wider range, it could be more inclusive and more effective. Do you see that as feasible?

Mr ROACH: The inclusiveness objective is essential. The discontinuance of the word "ethnic", which tends not to be inclusive, is essential. If Parliament in total demonstrates a consensus and goodwill, than that will set the example of inclusiveness for the community.

The Hon. D. F. MOPPETT: Yesterday a witness in trying to demonstrate the need for the continuance of the commission tendered three documents showing alleged prejudice in our community. One document attacked with vitriol the word "multicultural" as if there was no difference between that word and the word "ethnic" in terms of a pejorative meaning. Mr Kerkyasharian came and argued very strongly that there was little difference in terms of those who show prejudice against multicultural people in New South Wales. He said that we have to step outside the two words "ethnic" and "multicultural". What is your reaction to that?

Mr ROACH: There has been debate as to whether the term "multiculturalism" was divisive and whether it applied to everyone other than people of British or Irish background. That is why we pushed very strongly for the term to be referred to as often as possible as "Australian multiculturalism". That is why I talked about "multicultural New South Wales" in the suggestion that I made. It is making it clear that it is about the people of this State and the people of our country. I disagree with the view that the words "multicultural" and "ethnic" stand for the same things. They clearly do not, they do not logically. I do not believe that with the general public they stand for the same things. The word "multicultural" is clearly different. The fact that the Premier accepts the word "multicultural", and having wanted to drop the word "ethnic", is proof that he agrees that it is a positive word and worth adding to the name of the commission.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Do you agree that overall the ethnic community is very much divided on the name?

Mr ROACH: Yes, the ethnic communities are currently considering their position.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: No. Do you agree that they are very much divided?

Mr ROACH: I understand that they are not unanimous.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Earlier the Hon. H. S. Tsang asked you about three names. Your reply was that there is not much difference between them.

Mr ROACH: If the word "multicultural" is in all of them, which I thought it was.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: In order to unite the people of New South Wales and, in particular, the ethnic community, will you reiterate what you said to the Premier that it is a great opportunity for him to show statesmanship and to earn enormous goodwill by making a small concession?

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: The Premier has made the concession.

Mr ROACH: My own view evolved over time and I made a supplementary recommendation to the Premier. He has shown statesmanship by accepting the supplementary recommendation.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: The word "ethnic" relates to culture. Would you agree that the word "multicultural" relates to a combination of ethnic groups, and so they are related?

Mr ROACH: Yes, I think there are linkages between the two terms. The two terms are not entirely unrelated, but they are very different.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: One is multicultural, one is cultural. "Ethnic" is cultural. It has a variation as well, but that is its basic meaning.

Mr ROACH: "Multiculturalism" is an inclusive term. In my view, "ethnic" is no longer an inclusive term, if it ever was.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: It can be separate cultures. You say that the use of the word "multicultural" in the by-line has a value and we agree that it is a step in the right direction. However, is it not better to have "multicultural" in the core name?

Mr ROACH: I have said that.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Are you aware that the Ethnic Communities Council of New South Wales in a report tendered yesterday stated:

Amend all references to Community Relations Commission to a more appropriate name reflecting the objectives of the commission, such as Multicultural Affairs Commission.

Mr ROACH: I have not seen that document, if it was only tabled yesterday.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Are you aware that the Ethnic Communities Council is the peak organisation representing ethnic communities in New South Wales?

Mr ROACH: Yes, I am.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Roach, for appearing as a witness.

Mr ROACH: If I can conclude, in relation to issues of citizenship the Citizenship Council has produced a document that is complementary to the multicultural report. I will table that as well.

CHAIR: That document has already been tabled.

(The witness withdrew)

SAN-LING CECILIA FONG, General Medical Practitioner, 35A Murray Street, Croydon,

ROBERT DONNELLY, Teacher, Unit 8, 48 Wrentmore Street, Fairfield,

KEK KONG TAI, Social Worker, 5 Thirroul Circuit, Prestons, and

DANIEL TSUI, Manager, 73 Adrian Street, Macquarie Fields, sworn and examined, and

ANITA LEUNG, Administrative Clerk, Australian Chinese Buddhist Society, 654 Cabramatta Road, Bonnyrigg, affirmed and examined:

ZHAO BANG HUANG, Insurance Adviser, Level 1, 249 Liverpool Road, Ashfield, affirmed and examined through interpreter, Ms Angeline Oyang:

CHAIR: Would you each tell me in what capacity you are appearing before the Committee?

Dr FONG: As chairperson of the Elderly Australian Chinese Homes.

Mr DONNELLY: I represent the Australia-Chinese Business Association.

Mr TAI: As an individual.

Mr TSUI: A representative of the St James Anglican Church Chinese Congregation.

Ms LEUNG: On behalf of the Australian Chinese Buddhist Society.

Mr HUANG: Chairman, Chinese Migrant Welfare Association.

CHAIR: Did you each receive a summons issued under my hand in accordance with the Parliamentary Evidence Act 1901?

Dr FONG: Yes.

Mr DONNELLY: Yes.

Mr TAI: Yes.

Mr TSUI: Yes.

Ms LEUNG: Yes.

Mr HUANG: Yes.

CHAIR: Are you each conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Dr FONG: Yes.

Mr DONNELLY: Yes.

Mr TAI: Yes.

Mr TSUI: Yes.

Ms LEUNG: Yes.

Mr HUANG: Yes.

CHAIR: Does any witness wish to make a statement?

Mr TAI: Mr Chair, Reverend the Hon. F. J. Nile, and honourable members of the Legislative Council: I thank you for inviting me to address the inquiry into multiculturalism. In addition to my recent letter and submission I would like to take this opportunity to make a few remarks as an opening statement on behalf of the 37 organisations and myself. As you are aware, I had co-ordinated a brief petition to the inquiry dated 7 March 2000 individually and on behalf of the organisation, and then as an individual I put forward a submission on 20 April 2000. This demonstrates not only the organisation's trust in me but also their genuine interest in multiculturalism and in Multicultural New South Wales as a living reality and not political rhetoric.

Mr Chair, if I may be allowed I will state on record why I am qualified to represent the organisation and myself as a witness today. First, I am an Australian of Chinese descent, an ethnic, and have actively participated in community events, festivals and sports since my high school days at James Cook Boys High School then at the University of Sydney and now in the Chinese community. Second, I have been a social and community worker since 1985, working for the Chinese and Indochinese communities in the west and south-west regions of the Sydney metropolitan area. Third, I have also worked with other ethnic groups in a similar capacity, drawing people together, creating opportunities for mutual exchanges and understanding and promoting racial harmony and tolerance Sydneywide. Fourth, I am a "westie", working and living in Sydney's south-west region. I know the issues affecting westies, in particular ethnic westies, and have experienced at first hand multiculturalism as a reality.

Members of the 37 organisations and their families live in the inner-west, west, north-west and south-west. Together, we face the heights of racism and at the same time witness a sense of strong support and solidarity for multiculturalism, not as a concept but as a policy that should be properly and adequately implemented at all levels of government and community. This is because this is our daily experience. Fifth, I am a Christian, a Chinese Christian, an ethnic Christian, and proud to be called that. I represent not only groups of Chinese and Indochinese people who are Buddhists, Confucianists, Taoists, social activists or businesspeople but also Christians. I am particularly proud of my association with the Anglican Church of the Diocese of Sydney, because of its willingness to change from the old Anglicised form of worship and tradition to embrace multiculturalism and promote ethnic ministry.

I personally witnessed the development of Chinese congregations from one to 13. Two of those have become full parishes with the word "Chinese" or Chinese words added next to the word "Anglican"—unique to Sydney. The evolution of Chinese and ethnic congregations into full parishes in the same established Church is continuing. So, to promote multiculturalism to the very grassroots level, the New South Wales Government, in particular the Carr Labor Government, should not only enshrine multiculturalism in its legislation but implemented it at all levels of government and society. The Anglican Church of the Dioceses of Sydney, being of Anglo-Saxon Celtic tradition and culture, has shed its past to put on a new form, the multicultural form; for example, the Soldiers Memorial Church became the Cabramatta Anglican Church and is now the Cabramatta Chinese Anglican Church.

Legislation also allows for ethnic congregations to become an ethnic church as a full parish. Christian missionaries went into the pagan or heathen world with the colonialists and gradually adopted the colonial rule mentality. This old colonial ideology is very much practised in Australia, especially in New South Wales. New South Wales does not receive full independence from its colonialists; that ideology is utilised and practised by our State Labor Government, and in particular by our Premier, Bob Carr. Being a keen historian he knows very much about the minority, colonialist ideals and practices,

especially the divide and rule concept. The imposition of values, tradition, ideals and language by a dominant culture upon the majority—the ethnics—is part and parcel of colonial rule, the old mentality. It forces ethnics to be pacified, to fit in with the colonialists.

In this day and age such ideology, when used, usually divides and creates conflicts. It is divisive and Bob Carr has created division within the ethnics and in particular the Chinese community. Instead of bringing people together, which is what multiculturalism is all about, he separates people and communities and pacifies them according to their own corners; giving political promises individually and usually in contrast with and at the expense of another group. Is this social justice, equity and a fair go for all in a multicultural New South Wales? Is this the New South Wales we want for the next millennium? I, the whole group, and our children, all say a resounding no, no, and never. Thank you.

CHAIR: Does any other witness wish to make a statement?

Dr FONG: I am a medical practitioner and chairman of the Elderly Australian Chinese Homes Co-operative. I come across a great number of non-English speaking Chinese and other ethnic groups. The elderly have many concerns, especially with newspaper articles concerning multiculturalism and the Ethnic Affairs Commission. I would like to convey their sentiments through this submission.

CHAIR: The members of the Committee have a copy of the submission but you may summarise its main points.

Dr FONG: I refer to the replacement of the Ethnic Affairs Commission with the Community Relations Commission. The Ethnic Affairs Commission was established in 1979 under the Ethnic Affairs Commission Act 1979. With the abolition of the Ethnic Affairs Commission the principle of cultural diversity and the recognition of multiculturalism would be undermined. The reason for that is that the needs of ethnic groups are unrealistically assumed to be the same as those of the majority of the community. Australia is a country of migrants from all over the world. Some migrants, when they first come to this country, will face cultural and language problems. Each ethnic group needs special guidance and assistance to be provided by the government to bring it into the mainstream of society and to enable people from different ethnic backgrounds to live in harmony. The question is: which government body can they ask for help?

In relation to the change of title, when ordinary people look up the Macquarie dictionary to find out the meaning "ethnic" and "community" they find they have different meanings. One may argue that the Community Relations Commission Bill or the Act embraces all the functions and objectives carried out by the Ethnic Affairs Commission. However, one has to bear in mind that ordinary people—lay people—or may be only some of them, will have the language ability to peruse and understand the Act to analyse its functions and objectives. The lay person or ordinary citizen will only refer to the English dictionary to find out the meaning of those words. It is agreed that emphasis should be placed on the substance of the matter rather than the form, however, the change of the name from Ethnic Affairs Commission to Community Relations Commission will have an emotional impact on a lot of people from different cultures, which may lead to their loss of confidence in the functions and objectives carried out by the Community Relations Commission. That is because the names of the two government bodies are entirely different.

Our board of directors examined the Community Relations Commission and Principles of Multiculturalism Bill 1999 and the Ethnic Affairs Commission Act 1979. If one compares clauses 12 and 13 of the Community Relations Commission and Principles of Multiculturalism Bill with sections 15 and 16 of the Ethnic Affairs Commission Act 1979 one can see in the Ethnic Affairs Commission Act an emphasis on equal opportunity and an allowance for minority ethnic groups to have access to various services provided by the Government. We hope that in the Government's new commission the most important thing is not to ignore ethnic minority groups and, instead, the Government should

provide more funding to guide and help those minority groups to integrate into the society so as to build Australia as a better place to live.

The views gathered from our community group are that the transition from the Ethnic Affairs Commission to the new Community Relations Commission might create a certain degree of doubt to the present Government as to whether it is upholding the principles of cultural diversity, and different linguistic, religious and racial backgrounds that are in place and well-established in New South Wales. In order to remove such doubt, and to maintain public confidence, it is our view that: the name of the commission should clearly indicate that the commission must handle multicultural issues in a fair and impartial manner and must take care of the welfare of the community as a whole but in no way ignore the interests of the ethnic minority groups; the funding to the ethnic minority groups should be increased so as to assist them to solve their difficulties in integrating themselves into the mainstream; and the principle of multiculturalism which is essential in maintaining harmony among different ethnic groups in this country must be maintained. Thank you

Document tabled on motion by the Hon. J. M. Samios, seconded by the Hon. Dr P. Wong.

Mr DONNELLY: Today, ladies and gentlemen, this an attempt to redefine the national image of our nation. Therefore, it must not be forgotten that the principles of multiculturalism are an effort to modify existing concepts of the nation to match up to the new evolving realities and to create a new direction for the changing Australian nation. Australia is experiencing a cultural transformation; a redefining of its identity, from one that was shaped by purely Anglified images to one that has become a society rich in linguistic, racial, religious and cultural diversity which is leading towards a holistic acceptance of many cultures. Australia must be able to contribute to the nation's cultural and economic development. Australia has been enriched, challenged and altered by its diversity.

CHAIR: Could the witness speak to the committee and not to the visitors?

Mr DONNELLY: Yes. The Australian culture is a different one comprising a multitude of cultures emerging from different customs, beliefs and social and economic backgrounds. Here at the heart of multiculturalism is the idea that something quite new develops as a result, and questions Australia's identity and international relations. Multicultural Australia is a critical reflection of our own culture of who we are and what we are. What is at stake today is not the defence of a common culture but the creation of a democratic society which is representative of the true identity of Australian society, the true reflection of what it means to be Australian that upholds the principles of multiculturalism.

INTERPRETER: I am reading a statement prepared by Mr Huang in Chinese and translated into English and he prefers me to read it for him. Mr Huang would also like to amend the fact that he is also the vice-chairman of Australia Guangzhou Association.

Mr HUANG (Through interpreter): I, Zhao Bang Huang [Bill] of 5, 18-20 Noble Street, Allawah, New South Wales 2218, was born on 9 January 1949. I am an Australian citizen and my occupation is insurance adviser. I am chairman of the Chinese Migrant Welfare Association [CMWA] and vice president of Australia Guangzhou Association. I wish to give the following evidence to the Legislative Council. Funded by DIMA, CMWA was established in 1990. Its main aim is to assist Chinese migrants—people coming from the People's Republic of China [into the new environment, to integrate into mainstream society, and to maintain the Chinese traditional cultures as part of the Australian multicultural.

During this decade, CMWA has provided community settlement services for more than 50,000 clients. It has more than 3,000 and members. CMWA provides services for research institutions,

Australian government departments and media who seek advice on the issues about the PRC. It also reports the needs and suggestions of the community to the relevant departments. I found there was no objection in the Chinese community to the contents of the principle of multiculturalism that was put forward in the Community Relations Commission and Principles of Multiculturalism Bill 1999. I note that the proposed name change from the Ethnic Affairs Commission [EAC] to the Community Relations Commission was rejected by the Legislative Council in May 1999.

I found the alternative name change put forward by the Hon. Helen Sham-Ho MLC has been supported by many Chinese community groups. However, the Premier, Mr Bob Carr, does not make any compromises. Further, Labor supporters in the Chinese community are advocating the Premier's stand. This has led to a split of opinions among the Chinese communities, as shown below. In February, Ms Zhong, Vice-Chairman of the EAC, and Mr Anthony Pan, a Labor Party member, sought support from the so-called six largest Chinese community organisations. They declared in the Chinese newspapers that those six organisations were supportive of the bill and the name change. Subsequently, Premier Bob Carr made the same claims in Chinese newspapers. However, there are two points worth noting. First, Ms Zhong is a Vice-Chairman of the EAC. It is improper for her, as a public servant, to be an activist on these issues. Second, these six organisations are not the largest Chinese groups. Some of them have few members. In fact, AUSCOCO did not discuss these issues.. There was not a unanimous view regarding these issues.

On 18 March as many as 38 Chinese and Vietnamese organisations declared their support of the Hon. Helen Sham-Ho and other members of the Legislative Council who wrote a letter to the Premier. On 1 April I attended AUSCOCO's council meeting. That was the first time AUSCOCO discussed the bill. The meeting reached four viewpoints and decided to send 10 representatives to attend the meeting organised by the Premier on 7 April. On 7 April the Vice-President of the Australia China Guangzhou Association, Mr Stephen Liang, attended the Premier's meeting. He signed his name as usual. Nobody indicated that the signature implied support for the Premier. A representative, Mr Stanley Xie from Australia FuQing Association encountered the same problem. Later on, a news report claims that both of them supported the Premier. That is clearly not the case.

I found it very difficult to understand why the Government strongly objects to the addition of multiculturalism to the name while proposing the bill under the principles of multiculturalism. I think if the Premier believes his decision is right, and is in the interests of ethnic communities, there is a very simple way of making the decision. He should organise a meeting of all registered community organisations. Alternative names and opinions can be put to the meeting. An anonymous voting procedure can be adopted. The voting result would be acceptable to various communities. Thank you, yours truly, Bill Huang, Chairman of the CMWA.

All statements to the Committee tabled on motion by the Hon. H. S. Tsang.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: I take it because of time constraints perhaps at this stage we may be limited to one question each.

CHAIR: We will start with one question each.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: Since I represent three of us on this side I seek the indulgence of the chair because there are serious accusations of the Government and the Premier. In my questions I must have the chance to ask various questions because of that.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Mr Donnelly, why did you say in your statement of 18 March:

Further, it is an important opportunity to address the confusion and ambivalence that will be caused by changing the name to the Community Relations Commission. This is a critical factor

as the principles of multiculturalism have played a significant role in the economic and social development of contemporary Australia and for the term to be excluded from the bill, or relegated to merely a shallow by-line, will only alienate and marginalise our ethnic communities.

Mr DONNELLY: I strongly believe that this type of debate has gone on far too long in Australia. We are suffering from a complex of our identity, which is quite evident in our dealings overseas when I have gone to China in my capacity on how to define our country's image. I think multiculturalism has started to break down the barriers for us. It is not perfect and at times it is probably being mismanaged but I believe that this type of debate and the type of people now coming to the forefront, such as yourselves, could result in a positive feeling emerging. However, by changing the name suddenly in midstream will cause enormous confusion. How will you educate people? What assurance do we have that the correct image of Australia will be promoted overseas considering that it has not been able to manufacture our image at this stage.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: I seek clarification. Are the statements made by people here under parliamentary privilege?

CHAIR: They are under parliamentary privilege. That is why the witnesses were sworn in.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: Mr Bill Huang has made allegations that some organisations attended a meeting requested by the Chinese community to see the Premier and that some members signed an attendance book. Now the Premier is being accused of giving misinformation and that the community did not support the Premier. Mr Huang, you mentioned two names. Did they request you to witness the statement or you assume that is what they say? Mr Chairman, I am asking does he represent the two people.

CHAIR: The Committee may have to call those people.

Mr HUANG: Firstly, the President of the Guangzhou Association, Vincent Wu, signed his name to support Helen Sham-Ho's letter of 8 March this year.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: May I interrupt. The letter is on the document file we all have, submission No. 64. Also, submission No. 62 from the Sydney West Elderly Association to the Chairman includes those statements. The Hon. H. S. Tsang should have a copy of those documents.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: I have no problem with that. I am asking if he is making the accusations on behalf of those two organisations or does he just believe that that is the case.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: The organisations put in submissions in writing.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: This is about the statement he made.

Mr HUANG: On 1 April Stephen Liang and myself, both vice-presidents of the Guangzhou Association, attended the AUSCOCO meeting. In this meeting there were several agreements on the bill proposed by Bob Carr. At that time the AUSCOCO Secretary, Dr Tony Go, announced that on 7 April there will be a meeting with the Premier. AUSCOCO was allowed to give 10 representatives to that meeting so that we can reflect our opinion to the Premier. On 7 April Mr Stephen Liang attended to represent the Guangzhou Association. We read from a newspaper that our association's stand and our president's stand was reversed in the newspaper report. This is the report.

Document tabled on motion by the Hon. Dr P. Wong, seconded by the Hon. J. M. Samios.

CHAIR: I think the witness is saying that the newspaper report did not reflect their views properly.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: He is here on behalf of the Chinese Migrant Welfare Association. He has mentioned two organisations that believe that the Premier has misled them. Does he represent those two organisations or is he authorised to represent them here today? Are they aware of the accusations?

CHAIR: The question is: Did those people that Mr Huang referred to ask him to say those things today? Did they ask him to represent them?

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: They are serious accusations of the Government and the Premier.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: The member is really intimidating the witness this time.

CHAIR: Just wait a minute.

Mr HUANG: Can I speak the truth, the facts?

CHAIR: Yes, you must speak the truth.

Mr HUANG: Because the newspaper reported the name of our Guangzhou Association and the President has formally signed an endorsement of the proposal by Helen Sham-Ho, MLC, and I am the vice-president of the Guangzhou Association and one of the main founders of that association, I am very interested in this matter, so I rang Stephen Liang and asked him about the meeting on that day. I asked whether Stephen had spoken or not. He said he did not speak anything. He only signed his name when he entered the meeting. He thought he was signing on.

CHAIR: Attendance?

Mr HUANG: Attendance, yes. That was it.

CHAIR: As it is a matter about which the Hon. H. S. Tsang is concerned, I suggest that he gets a copy of *Hansard*.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: I suggest that the persons should be invited to the inquiry.

CHAIR: He should then write out further questions on notice to the witness, otherwise the entire time will be spent on this issue, which does not benefit the other witnesses, who wish to answer questions.

Mr HUANG: I would also like to speak about the FuQuing Association. There were two associations: one was the Guangzhou and the other was the FuQuing Association. Peter Chan, who is President of the FuQuing Association, I know signed to endorse Helen Sham-Ho. The representative of FuQuing Association was Stanley Xie. Since I saw the name of the FuQuing Association in the newspaper, I did ring Stanley Xie. I asked had he spoken in that meeting with Bob Carr. He said he did not say anything. He also signed the attendance sheet, so I recognised that these two organisations did not alter their presidents' endorsements. That is it.

CHAIR: It could be that the attendance sheet was given to the newspaper and the newspaper has assumed that these people all supported the statements.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: The Premier claims that in his lower House speech. Furthermore, submission No. 62 also mentions he was not aware of the issue.

CHAIR: I think we have enough information. Thank you for explaining it to us.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Mr Tai, on behalf of the group of 37 organisations and the 70 or so Chinese people here today, do you accept the by-line?

Mr TAI: Yes, I do. You mean the multicultural New South Wales by-line?

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Yes. Do you think that was a good compromise?

Mr TAI: I think it does reflect the composition of this State and the nature of this State in terms of these people and the reality that a lot of us are living in. I have had feedback from people living in Fairfield city saying, "Why do we still talk about multiculturalism as something that is still a concept when we walk out of our front door and we experience the reality of multiculturalism."

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: I think you misunderstood my question. Do you accept the Community Relations Commission with the by-line for multicultural Australia?

Mr TAI: Yes.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: You have no problem with that name?

Mr TAI: No.

CHAIR: Just to make it clear what the Hon. Dr P. Wong is saying, we understand that the Premier has agreed to add the words "for a multicultural New South Wales" to the title of the commission. The question is: Is that satisfactory from your point of view?

Mr TAI: You mean the Community Relations Commission and then a by-line underneath?

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Yes, underneath.

Mr TAI: Okay, sorry, no.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Why not?

Mr TAI: It has got to reflect the nature of the society that we are in. The words "community relations" are too general and unspecific. Even though the State Government is saying it is inclusive, I think it is not. In a way I think the Premier is giving way to some sections of the community that feel that the word "multicultural" is derogatory. It may be derogatory at this moment in time, but I think if we are to look ahead in the future the word "multicultural" not only represents something that is positive in this State and this country but it is also well known internationally. In my submission I addressed another part of the term of reference regarding multicultural arts. I think multicultural arts as an art form, as a concept, has promoted this State and Australia as a multicultural Australia.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Will you accept the entire title, "Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural New South Wales"?

Mr TAI: If it is the same in print and size as "Community Relations", yes.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: Mr Tai, you also make a very serious accusation against the Government and the Premier. Do you make the statement on behalf of all those 37 organisations?

Mr TAI: Yes.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: Are you aware that the Government sees the initial announcement as having clear concessions? Apart from the byline, the bill itself now has the terms "Community Relations" and "Multiculturalism". Are you aware that an adjustment has been made since consultation took place?

The Hon. Dr. P. WONG: Mr Chair, that is not correct.

CHAIR: I think the Hon. H. S. Tsang is referring to the title of the bill as it is now before the Legislative Council after having been passed by the Legislative Assembly. The bill is now called the "Community Relations Commission and Principles of Multiculturalism Bill 2000".

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: You are aware that the adjustment took place after consultation?

Mr TAI: Yes.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: You are aware that since consultation and so on, the Community Relations Commission has a lot more power than before to deal with racism.

The Hon. Dr. P. WONG: Mr Chair, the Hon. H. S. Tsang is making a statement. I question that. I do not believe that there is more power.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: The witness can answer for himself.

The Hon. Dr. P. WONG: If you think you can interrupt me, I can interrupt you as well.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: Of course, you can. I am simply replying to you that the witness is an educated person, a Sydney University graduate who has worked in the community for many years. I am asking him whether he is aware. He can say that there is no power.

CHAIR: Would you rephrase the question, so that the witness knows what he is expected to say.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: Mr Tai, are you aware that since consultation the bill now gives the commission additional power to deal with racism and requires government bodies and other people to work for multiculturalism?

The Hon. Dr. P. WONG: There is no such power to require.

Mr TAI: There is the Anti-Discrimination Board that is supposed to look after racism.

CHAIR: I think the question is: Are you aware that the bill contains such a provision? Obviously, you are not aware, so the answer would be no?

Mr TAI: No.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Mr Tai, what do you believe will happen if the Government does proceed with the name "Community Relations Commission"?

Mr TAI: I think it reflects a lack of commitment on the part of the Government in promoting multiculturalism. On the one hand, you say that there is a bill with the word "multiculturalism" in it. You add it in, but you change the Ethnic Affairs Commission into something else. I think that for a lot of new migrants—and even a lot of people like me, who are old migrants, and many others—if there were a change of that name to something too general, there would be a reaction from all these people, thinking that we are stepping two steps backwards to something that we had in the 1970s. It also brings about international backlash towards not only this State but Australia as a whole, because Sydney has been seen to be the most mixed cosmopolitan society, not only in the southern hemisphere but in the whole world.

CHAIR: Mr Tsui, do you have any views on the name that has now been proposed by the Premier, that is, "Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural New South Wales"?

Mr TSUI: I do. If we look at the name that the Premier suggests to use, I think it is a downgrade to the function of the commission. In the past Australia has been a country that says it can accept ideas and suggestions on racism. If we use this name, it is quite clear that it is a downgrade for the commission. If we use "Community Relations and Multiculturalism Commission", many people can understand directly. If we use the name that the Premier suggests, it means that multiculturalism is just one of the functions that the commission will perform.

CHAIR: You prefer the word "Multiculturalism" to be included in the title of the commission, so that it reads "Community Relations Multiculturalism Commission"?

Mr TSUI: I prefer the name "Community Relations and Multiculturalism Commission". This is more formal and easier to understand for the people in Australia—or even people outside Australia. People will know that it is really the Australian way because we have a democratic society. Even if it is a simple name that we cannot accept, that is not a democratic way to do things.

CHAIR: Dr Fong, you made a strong argument about the meaning of the words. Would you say that scrapping the word "ethnic" and replacing it with the word "community" is too dramatic a change?

Dr FONG: Yes. But as time goes on things change, so anything that changes has gone through a process. I would say that probably a more direct way is to lead the community to understand what the Government is trying to do. From ethnic to community relations, there is something in between. I think "multiculturalism" is the word to lead the people's understanding of the future Community Relations Commission. By jumping straightaway from one to the other leads to confusion and multiculturalism can always be forgotten. The name introduced now has the consultation, but initially it did not have community consultation before the name was introduced. If you have just the small print, people will worry that this small print will eventually drop off without any consultation and without anybody's notice that it has changed. I would prefer to have the word "Multiculturalism" incorporated into the title.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Mr Tai, would it not have been better for the Government to have consulted with the communities before announcing the proposed name change?

Mr TAI: As a community worker, there is a need to consult first before you decide. If you do something before consultation, it is called tokenism in sociological terms in our field. Therefore, I think the Government has gone the wrong way without full-on consultation. It has suggested the name change first, and then gone about consultation. I think it is just like saying, "This is the name. I have talked to you, you signed it, and that is it, you agree I consulted you."

CHAIR: Did you all receive earlier the document entitled "The Way Forward: A Consultation Document Leading to a Community Relations Commission", asking for your views on what the Premier announced?

Mr TAI: No, I do not have that document.

CHAIR: A number of you made submissions objecting to what is contained in the document, is that right?

Mr TAI: There is also another document put out by the National Committee on Multiculturalism.

CHAIR: Many of you made submissions not agreeing with the name, and it appears that your submissions are being ignored. Is that what you feel?

Mr TAI: Yes.

CHAIR: You have objected to this, but nothing has happened other than adding the byline, the words underneath the title?

Mr TAI: That is right. We were involved with the summit on multiculturalism that was held in February in the Parliament. That was the time that we—

CHAIR: You expressed your objections to it then?

Mr TAI: Yes.

The Hon. Dr. P. WONG: Mr Tai, is it true that Mr Dacco Ngo, the President of the Buddhist Society, is also the president of the Mount Pritchard branch of the Labor Party?

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: I ask the relevance of this question. I have not asked any one of them.

The Hon. Dr. P. WONG: Okay, I was wrong.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: I can say that Mr Kwong used to work for Mr Peter Wong and that they had a very close association. And I can say that Mr Tai also had a very close association with the party. I can keep going on, and I can assure—

CHAIR: You have made your point. The Hon. Dr P. Wong has withdrawn the question.

Dr FONG: I am not representing or working for any party; I am independent and representing my own organisation.

Mr DONNELLY: I think this is probably what started to happen in Australia and what has held us back with the Hon. J. M. Samios' question to me previously. This type of multiculturalism becomes politicised. I can see what is starting to happen: it is becoming a political football when multiculturalism is the people of this society. I do not mean any offence by this, but as politicians you are sometimes far removed from the people's feelings. Perhaps this consultation process should be carried out where you go into the communities and find out. You may see something different. Otherwise, it simply becomes politicised and nobody benefits.

(The witnesses withdrew) (Short adjournment)

MICHAEL CANTALI, Engineer, P. O. Box 24, Concord, New South Wales, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: In what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Mr CANTALI: As a private individual but also as a member of the Italian community of New South Wales and as a councillor on Concord Council.

CHAIR: Did you receive a summons issued under my hand in accordance with the provisions of the Parliamentary Evidence Act 1901?

Mr CANTALI: Yes.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Mr CANTALI: Yes.

CHAIR: Do you wish to make an opening statement or any remarks?

Mr CANTALI: Not really. Just basically that I would like to make myself available on two main issues that concern me. One is particularly in my capacity as a councillor with Concord Council and some of the problems we are having in giving access and equity to the people of my municipality. I notice there are similar sorts of problems in other areas, particularly in places like Concord in the inner west, where many of the residents and communities of the local councils do not have an English speaking background and may be disadvantaged by some information about services and facilities from council. The second issue I am concerned about is the change of the name of the Ethnic Affairs Commission. I do not see the need for that, to the extent that it is being changed. I would like to see the word "ethnic" or "multiculturalism" in the new name, as part of the name per se, rather than as a by-line underneath it, as is proposed.

CHAIR: "For a Multicultural New South Wales"? You do not think that is adequate? You prefer to have the word "multiculturalism" in the name?

Mr CANTALI: I would like to have the word "ethnic" per se in the name as well, quite frankly. It describes the work of the commission and I presume the work the Government is trying to do with our communities. All Australians, whether they come from one particular part of world or another, whether from an English-speaking country or a non-English-speaking country, or are indigenous Australians, are all ethnics. It makes no difference where we are from. The word "ethnic" describes all cultures from all backgrounds. It is not restrained and it should not be interpreted to mean that it is applicable only to those people from non-English-speaking backgrounds. So, I do not see why the word "ethnic" should not be part of the name per se.

CHAIR: You mentioned the council having problems. I am just checking the bill. As far as I understand it, the Community Relations Commission, and I suppose the old Ethnic Affairs Commission, could require the council to submit a report on how it implemented, previously, the principles of cultural diversity and, now, the principles of multiculturalism. You feel that is a positive move?

Mr CANTALI: It is like everything else. It is like the equal opportunity policy. Our council has that. Concord Council was one of the first councils to have a statement for ethnic affairs, a local government ethnic affairs policy. Certainly when I was on the committee for local government ethnic affairs issues, I was aware that those statements were there as part of the requirements for local government and that the Government was trying to promote that issue. But nothing can be promoted

unless one has the resources to do so. Unfortunately, my council, although it has these statements of wanting to proceed in that area and wanting to keep the people of the municipality informed, finds itself not doing it, not because it does not want to but simply because the resources are not sufficient. Unless one marks those resources for that specific purpose—in other words, unless there is some mandatory or legislative requirement to proportion some part of council's budget to that specific issue—it will not get done.

Local government is unable to raise its own funds other than by taxes on rates, which are pegged by the State Government anyway, so we do not have the facility to increase taxes or change taxes, in the way that many governments can. So we are restrained by the resources we have allocated to us under the system we have to collect revenue. So basically, we do not have the money or the resources to promote whatever aspirations people in councils may wish to promote.

CHAIR: It just occurred to me that in Concord you would have many people from various multicultural backgrounds. They are contributing in their rates and taxes to the council. Surely you could argue that a percentage, therefore, should be allocated to assist those people.

Mr CANTALI: They were the thoughts that came to me as I was driving here this morning as to what I you should talk about. I was the first councillor of Italian background to be elected to Concord Council, and I am still the only councillor of Italian background there.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: Peter is not Italian?

Mr CANTALI: Peter is a New Zealander, as you are probably well aware. No, he is not and we do not have any other ethnics of an Italian background. There is a woman there but unfortunately she does not have the same commitment or certainly does not have the exposure to the Italian community that I have. That is not her prime reason for being on council. It is a very multicultural community. About 15 per cent of the community of Concord, according to the old figures, are of Italian background and speak Italian at home as a preferred language. As you point out, those people contributed their shares to the resources—in fact almost one-eighth of the resources—that council has, yet council makes no specific allocation to their needs.

Having said that 15 per cent are Italian, there are also many other nationalities. The other big percentage is the Lebanese community, and there is a small percentage of Chinese, Greeks and others as well. When you collect them altogether we have a greater percentage of ethnic people contributing to the coffers of council yet, as I say, no specific allocation is made to provide them with the same level of information that is afforded to those people of English-speaking backgrounds. We have made some strides. I have been very active in trying to do that. Council would like to do that. In fact, on the back of any communication from council there is a line in several languages indicating that if they do not understand the contents of the letter they should ring council and get an interpreter.

They are the sorts of things that can be done, but unfortunately, when we issue our press releases, that is information that council determines should go to the whole community, they are only issued in English. So those few people who do not speak English or do not even read the newspaper—and obviously they would not pick up the newspaper if they cannot read it, so they are not likely to see it anyway—would not be aware of what is going on in council. That has been of great concern in the past few weeks and months. Council has been asked by the Government to consider a joint council with Drummoyne Council. My council has issued the number of press releases about the amalgamation of councils and not one of them has been issued in a language other than English. Nobody in the community who does not speak English has been written to by council and informed what is going on. So, there has been no communication to the people of Concord and I understand to the people of Drummoyne as well.

Most of the people in those communities do not have English as their first language and while many people in the community can speak English or perhaps have children who can interpret for them—as I did with my parents as I grew up—it is very difficult for children to translate important issues such as amalgamations of two councils. Certainly this issue of amalgamation is of great concern because it really goes down to the core of democracy. It is a question being put to the ratepayers by this Government and, in turn, by a council whether they want to amalgamate with another council. It is not just whether we are going to have garbage bins or whether we are going to increase the rate levies or something of a secondary nature or a by-product of local government, this is the essence of council itself. It is tantamount to whether we should get rid of the upper House of Parliament or whether we should amalgamate with New Zealand as a State of Australia. Those sorts of issues should be put to the people.

I do not think is political. Unfortunately, because of lack of resources council cannot go to the people in those various languages. Items of real consequence that need to be debated by the community should be put in several languages in newspaper articles and advertisements. They are not. As I say, that is not purely because of political reasons; rather it is lack of finance. Local councils are strapped for money. I suppose we would all like to do more, those of us who are in government in one form or another, but it is very difficult to do what you would like to do for the people if you do not have the resources.

So that is the issue I would like to put to you this morning, that local government should be made to not only have the statements which are there, and is all very well to have them, but they should be made to implement them. The only way they can do that is by making the Government allocate specific funds or have the councils provide some pro rata way of sharing their budgets to make sure that people in the municipality are given access and equity in the same way as other people in the community are.

CHAIR: So would you like that to be made an amendment to the bill, to strengthen that aspect?

Mr CANTALI: Yes, I would like somehow rather that the bill should incorporate the means or some requirement for local councils to make some budgetary allocation. Local councils could do that in a number of ways and perhaps it is not the right time to do it here. I am sure the Government is aware of the various ways those funds could be raised. It is important that the bill reflect that requirement of at least some funds, whether on a pro rata basis, particularly for those communities where there is diverse multiculturalism or ethnicity.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: You and your family had a stronger working dialogue with the ethnic communities in the area, particularly Italian I gather from your comments, is that right?

Mr CANTALI: Yes.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Is it fair to say that that goes back to earlier policies of multiculturalism and to a period of assimilation, which were policies that existed up to 1967, and later the integration policy that ran until 1973, and then the multiculturalism policy, which has run since 1973 until now. That working dialogue would have come from the fact that your father was the foundation secretary of the Sicilian society or organisation. Your wife is also of Italian background and was the proprietor of a foreign language bookshop at one stage as well as having much involvement in the community. Is it your perception that the multiculturalism policy is working as the best policy we have at the moment?

Mr CANTALI: I think the current policy is very good. Australia and certainly New South Wales. I guess I am privy to that sort of information because of the extent of time that I have been in

Australia. As the Hon. J. M. Samios points out, I arrived in Australia at a time when assimilation was the flavour of the month, which was in the early 1950s, 1953 I believe. I went to a Catholic boarding college where I was the only Italian student. Playing football was not easy, although I did achieve fame in that area, certainly in the school environment. Certainly through the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s we have had changes and in the 1980s and 1990s with the Ethnic Affairs Commission with the introduction of our charter for ethnic affairs. I think New South Wales with all its various governments, whether they be of one persuasion or the other, has done tremendous things in achieving our present situation.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: You were a member of the commission at the time of the charter, were you not?

Mr CANTALI: That is correct.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: It was introduced first by the Fahey Government as a Cabinet decision.

Mr CANTALI: Yes. In achieving that charter there was much dialogue. I am not sure, but I think the Hon. Dr P. Wong may have been with us at that time. There was a lot of dialogue on the sorts of words to be used, whether we should use "ethnic" or "multiculturalism" or this or that. It is always very difficult because different people have different perceptions of what we mean by ethnic, multicultural and so on. Certainly I think Australia has one of the best multicultural communities in the world. We are all performing and contributing to this great country.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: That being the case, would you be happy to have included in the new name of the Ethnic Affairs Commission as proposed by the Government the word "multicultural", but not as a by-line?

Mr CANTALI: I think the word "ethnic" or "multicultural" must be there. I do not think the work of the commission has changed since I left. The basic issues and concept of the Government of this State and other States with similar commissions have not changed at all in the last few years other than perhaps finetuning. There is always room for finetuning in our policies, whether they be ethnic affairs or others. Certainly in the ethnic affairs scenario we have a good policy. The name of the commission should reflect what the Government is trying to do. It is pointless to have it as a by-line or have it somewhere else because frankly, by-lines from time to time can be dropped. If the name reflects what it is the Government is trying to do, then it ought to be there. Why would you want to call the Ethnic Affairs Commission that does the work it currently does something that does have the word "ethnic" or "multicultural" there? Why would you try to describe the New South Wales community as other than one which is in fact ethnic based, of various ethnic communities? Or, one word to replace ethnic communities would be "multicultural".

Whether you use a dictionary definition of our community as we have or whether you use a layman's terminology for describing the community we have in New South Wales, indeed in the rest of Australia, our community is based on a number of ethnic cultures from all over the world. The one word that describes that if you are going to change many ethnic communities is the word "multiculturalism". Whichever way you look at it, either use the words "ethnic affairs commission", department or whatever. Certainly you would want to include the word "ethnic affairs". If you are not going to have the word "ethnic affairs" or "ethnic", you would have to replace it with words that describe the similar function, that is, multiculturalism or multicultural.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Is it your perception that the community is unhappy with the choice of name?

Mr CANTALI: It is more than unhappy. There are two aspects. There is always the hidden agenda or perception of people. I am quite happy to bring it forward here. Many people consider themselves ethnic on the assumption that they do not come from an English-speaking background. Many people of Anglo-Saxon background also consider themselves not to be ethnic. That is far from the truth. All of us have an ethnic background. It does not matter where we came from or where we were born. As I said before, whether you are indigenous, come from an English-speaking background or non-English-speaking background, we all have an ethnic nature or background or cultural background which we call ethnicity.

To change the name so as not to reflect those of us who came here, or those who came here particularly now, would not be the same. Those fresh people coming to this country without much time consider themselves to be ethnic inasmuch as they find themselves to be different, particularly with language and cultural differences, and they have not assimilated, to use the word loosely, to the way of life we have as Australia's multicultural way of life. Because they find themselves different, the name "Ethnic Affairs Commission" would not be the same if it did not have the word "ethnic" or "multicultural" because they identify themselves and perceive themselves as ethnic—perhaps not understanding that we are all ethnics.

That is the real issue and problem that particularly new arrivals to Australia, new communities, face. It is not so quite pronounced amongst Italians or those communities that have been here longer. Certainly new arrivals are angry at the situation that may arise. They perceive the word "ethnic" or "multiculturalism" being used to describe their situation. I do not know how you do that if you do not have the word "ethnic" or "multicultural". It is the very essence of our commission to provide the access and equity to those who come here and feel they do not have the access or equity and did not have the access or equity in the past. It is those people this commission must satisfy. It is that very point: those people must feel they are in a new country and being catered for by this or any other Government, by a department or commission that looks after their interests.

The words "ethnic" and "multiculturalism" make them feel that the department is there for their purpose, which it is. We only have an Ethnic Affairs Commission because we have diversity of ethnic cultures. If we had the one culture in this country we certainly would not need an Ethnic Affairs Commission. It is that very essence that we have the commission to look after new arrivals, particularly to make them feel a part of our community, make them feel there are resources this Government is concerned about that we have those names.

If we do not have those names and terms on the name of the commission, you are disfranchising those people and not making them feel as if they are wanted here or as if they are part of our community. I feel very strongly about that. Many times, certainly when I was with the commission, we debated about what we really meant by "multicultural" and "ethnic affairs" and other issues. To the lay person, and I am sure to most of us around this room, they mean similar things. They certainly embrace the culture we see in our streets today.

CHAIR: A number of times you said, "We are all ethnics. We all have an ethnic background." Could it be that the Premier accepts your view and, therefore, a Community Relations Commission, now applies to everybody?

Mr CANTALI: It does.

CHAIR: In other words, is it looking forward to a new era, so to speak?

Mr CANTALI: You tell that to the people of Kosovo.

CHAIR: Perhaps it is jumping too far into the future.

Mr CANTALI: Tell that to the people of Kosovo or others who are facing troubles. They have lived there for hundreds of years and perhaps have assimilated. The reason we have this harmony and the current situation is that this Government, previous governments and we as a community acknowledge our multiculturalism and ethnicity. If we say we are all the same, that we no longer need this requirement, it does two things. First, it does not differentiate the need we all have; although we are still part of the same community and the fact that we are all ethnics does not mean to say we all have the same needs.

When I say that we are all ethnic, I do not mean that we all have the same ethnicity, I mean that we all have an ethnic background. However, that ethnic background, that ethnicity, is different for each one of us. As the Ethnic Affairs Commission and this Government has always tried to do, we should maintain that culture. There is nothing wrong with trying to maintain that culture whilst ever we are here. That culture has contributed greatly to this country. It has contributed tremendously to the food, the way of life, the culture, the sports. Everything we do in this country has been influenced by the fact that we are all ethnics. But we are all different ethnics, and that is the issue. That is why the term must be there. Otherwise we are not seen nor perceived to be ethnic, particularly by the new arrivals who come to this country. This country, whether we like it or not, will have new ethnics coming to it or new arrivals of different background. It is very important that we extend to them what we have extended to those who are here before.

After all, the community we have today is extremely well balanced. It is cordial and supportive of the Government, it supports our way of life. The community is in complete harmony. Why would you want to change it? Why would you want to even consider doing something that we are unsure about and has been untried? It boggles the mind to try to change something that we all know. I am sure that everyone here, and the Premier, accepts that we have a community that is in complete harmony. We get along very well together, we look after those who have come in the past and we will look after those who will come in the future. We all consider ourselves ethnic but we are all of different background, we are not all the same.

The Hon. D. F. MOPPETT: You have laboured on the interpretation that you place on the word "ethnic". You would have to acknowledge that any comprehensive dictionary today would include a pejorative meaning to the word "ethnic".

Mr CANTALI: I do not necessarily agree with what the dictionary says. All I am saying to you is the layman's interpretation of what the people out there think, whether they be educated to the extent that perhaps you are. I do not understand what you mean by the question or the word "pejorative." Do you mean a worsening effect?

The Hon. D. F. MOPPETT: It is used in a derogatory fashion.

Mr CANTALI: I do not consider that at all. I do not consider that ethnic people out there consider that it is derogatory. I apologise for using the word "bastard", but when I was at university I was called "the best wog bastard they ever knew" by some of my friends.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: They were your friends?

Mr CANTALI: Yes. When I was called similar words when I was playing football with some of the kids at school I reacted very differently, I can tell you.

The Hon. D. F. MOPPETT: Most of the other witnesses have acknowledged that we should move on from "ethnic". You are the first witness who has said that you believe the word "ethnic" is the most appropriate term to describe the Ethnic Affairs Commission.

Mr CANTALI: I have said that the word "ethnic" or the word "multiculturalism" should be there to describe it. We are a community. I apologise if I have said otherwise. What I am trying to state is that we are a community of multi-ethnic people in Australia. We are all ethnic but we all come from different backgrounds. You either have the word "ethnic" in the title or name or you have the word "multiculturalism", which means that we are from many different ethnic backgrounds. That is what I mean. If what you are saying is true and it is said in a derogatory way, I agree. But many nice words can be said in a derogatory way if that is the intention of the words. It depends how they are said. If that is the case, perhaps it is a matter of education. Perhaps we should educate the people of New South Wales that the use of the word "ethnic" applies to those who have come here from English-speaking backgrounds as well. They are also ethnics, and indigenous people are ethnics. We are all ethnics. That is the point I want to make.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: If you like to be called ethnic, then you are happy to be so called and you are proud of it. If you feel that it is negative, then you would not use the word. I am talking about the Ethnic Communities Council of New South Wales or ethnic schools or ethnic child care centres. If they are proud of it, they like to be called ethnic—such as black people who call themselves black. It is an identity. If they are proud of it and empowered by it, it should be used without people telling them it is negative.

Mr CANTALI: I agree with that. That is why people use those words—ethnic schools or ethnic centre or the Ethnic Communities Council. They do it for that very reason—they want to identify themselves. They want everybody else to know that is what they are. It is like a business that calls itself a particular name that reflects its business. It is always good to have a name that reflects the business of your organisation, such as water suppliers, cup holders, whatever it is that you manufacture. If your name reflects the business it is an added advertisement of the work you do. You are saying to those people who want to call themselves by that name to by all means do so. I do not see anything wrong with that. It identifies the sort of work they do. Then when people look up the phone book or whenever the name is used they will say that is an organisation that caters for a specific item. Unfortunately, as Mr Moppett has suggested, the community often says that it applies to those people who come here from overseas. It does not. Our community should be educated that we are all ethnics no matter where we come from.

(The witness withdrew)

VINH NGUYEN, Vice President, External Affairs, Vietnamese Community in Australia, New South Wales Chapter, 300 Chapel Road, Bankstown, and

NGA KIM DO, Committee member, Vietnamese Community in Australia, New South Wales Chapter, 300 Chapel Road, Bankstown, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Do you wish to make an opening statement?

Mr NGUYEN: I would like to make an opening statement on behalf of the management committee of the Vietnamese Community in Australia, New South Wales [VCA]. First of all, I would like to thank the Chairman of the General Purpose Standing Committee No. 1 for giving us this opportunity to appear before the standing committee inquiry into multiculturalism. VCA New South Wales recognises the need for a change to multiculturalism in Australia. We commend and thank the Government on its efforts in consulting with the various community groups. The proposed legislation has recognised the principle of cultural diversity. Nevertheless, VCA New South Wales is concerned with the change of name to Community Relations Commission, which can be broadly interpreted and can consequently lose focus in addressing the issues facing ethnic communities.

We share the view that the commission needs to enhance its role in line with growth among many communities. We believe there are still people from non-English speaking backgrounds, as well as the newly established communities, who are very much in need of government services that are in place today. VCA is therefore in favour of an addition to the change of name, that is, Community Relations Commission for Multiculturalism in New South Wales. That is a minor change to our submission where we put "Australia", but we would like to start with the premier State first. This name change could give more clarity to the purpose of the commission. VCA New South Wales does not favour the inclusion of the concept of citizenship in the bill because it confuses and deviates from the role of the State Government in the Commonwealth jurisdiction of citizenship, which is related to the acquisition of Australian citizenship through the act of naturalisation. The idea would potentially give a false impression that people from non-English speaking backgrounds do not wish to take up Australian citizenship.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: The Vietnamese community has had a short involvement in resettlement here compared with many other ethnic groups, but it has grown rapidly in influence and achievement. Is it your impression that nevertheless the community still has a major need for the services of the Ethnic Affairs Commission?

Mr NGUYEN: On behalf of VCA New South Wales we certainly thank the Government's efforts to put in place policies to provide government services to the Vietnamese community, which is a newly established community. However, as you say, in comparison to other ethnic communities the Vietnamese community still needs the government services that would give initial assistance to the new arrivals so that they can quickly resettle in Australia and then later on they can successfully integrate into Australian society. We believe that the Government should do more in order to lift the worth of multiculturalism, which is inclusive. We say that we should have one society, not an ethnic community and mainstream society running in parallel.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Is it your impression that the change of name to Community Relations Commission without including the name "multicultural" or "ethnic" would be confusing?

Miss DO: I can demonstrate that from a simple example. I have just recently involved myself in the community and made myself familiar with the Ethnic Affairs Commission, its services and what it does. From reading the bill with the name change to Community Relations Commission I can see at face value its loose focus in terms of the initial objective of the commission, which is to provide

services to the ethnic communities to help them to settle into Australian society and to promote cultural diversity and harmony. I see the change of name to "Community Relations" as a broader focus. The word "committee" could mean an ethnic organisation or a sporting club. On face value it is loose in explaining what the commission is trying to achieve in promoting multiculturalism in Australia.

CHAIR: Your submission, paragraph 2.3.2, recommends that the name of the commission be the Community Relations Commission for Multiculturalism in Australia. Do you still want that as the title?

Miss DO: Yes, but we would like to change it slightly to the Community Relations Commission for Multiculturalism in New South Wales, rather than Australia.

CHAIR: That change is understandable.

Miss DO: That is more specific.

Mr NGUYEN: We do not want to be too ambitious at this stage.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: The Government added a byline to the Community Relations Commission, namely Multicultural New South Wales. Do you think that those words are acceptable?

Miss DO: To have it as a byline is nice, but it does not carry any emphasis about the commission's role. If the word "multiculturalism" is embedded in the name of the commission that would give it a stronger focus rather than having it as a byline.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: How big as the Vietnamese community in Australia?

Mr NGUYEN: The latest figures show that in New South Wales there are 70,000 Vietnamese, and of those 14,000 were born in Australia.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Is it the peak of group representing the Vietnamese community in New South Wales?

Mr NGUYEN: Yes.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Is it not a fact that you promote the biggest ethnic function in the Sydney Basin, which is held at Warwick Farm every year and at which 17,000 people attend over the three days?

Miss DO: Yes, that is correct.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: I have attended that function on a number of occasions.

Miss DO: That is what the yearly statistics indicate.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: It is a remarkable effort for a newly arrived people.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Would you say that the title "Community Relations Commission" is a concern of your management committee alone or a general concern of the Vietnamese community?

Mr NGUYEN: The VCA New South Wales Chapter is the peak body that represents 94 associations including political, religious and social associations. We represent all those 94 organisations.

CHAIR: Are they all affiliated with the Vietnamese community in Australia?

Mr NGUYEN: Yes.

CHAIR: Do the 94 organisations have a voice: a council, or an executive?

Mr NGUYEN: Yes, the executive committee of the VCA is elected every two years. We have a direct election and an indirect election. The direct election is by all Vietnamese Australians living in New South Wales and they have a vote. One man, one vote. A representative of the 94 organisations in New South Wales has a vote, which equals one vote to 30 individual votes. We represent the broader Vietnamese community in New South Wales, particularly the Sydney area.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: That includes the Chinese grouping, the Vietnamese-Chinese are part of that?

Mr NGUYEN: Yes.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Are you aware of the presence of the translator, Angeline Oyang, and the role she played in the formation of the United Vietnamese association years ago?

Mr NGUYEN: No.

The Hon. D. F. MOPPETT: In advancing the title Community Relations Commission for Multicultural New South Wales, I am a little concerned that sounds like a description. A lot of organisations in common usage are cut back to acronyms, such as EAC. In effect, that would be the de facto community relationship commission. Would you prefer it be called the Ethnic Affairs Commission, the Multicultural Affairs Commission or the Commission for Multicultural Affairs?

Mr NGUYEN: As I stressed before, with the modern Australian society I think the word "ethnic" is no longer relevant. It gives the impression of separation.

Miss DO: Originally the word probably had merit in describing the types of people migrating to a new country. As we progress we agree that the public perception of ethnicity has been stereotyped as minority groups. We support the intention that we need to move away from ethnicity and adopt a term that is more of a future look in promoting multiculturalism in Australia. You can still deliver your objectives in promoting multiculturalism without the word "ethnicity", but you need to have "multiculturalism" in the name.

The Hon. D. F. MOPPETT: It has been suggested by some witnesses that the word "multiculturalism" is only a shade removed from "ethnic" in terms of the prejudices it promotes. Would you agree?

Miss DO: I do not think so. Multiculturalism is a positive word. In Australia we have enjoyed the society of many cultures. It is not a shade of ethnicity at all.

Mr NGUYEN: I stress that the definition of "multiculturalism" includes three elements: first, loyalty to Australia; second, acceptance of the Australian system; and, third, mutual respect. Multiculturalism is about inclusion and recognition. Anything short of that or replacing the word "ethnic" is not a commitment to a multicultural society.

CHAIR: Is that definition included in your submission?

Miss DO: No. We could probably provide it to you in a supplementary submission.

CHAIR: That would be helpful. We do not have a definition of multiculturalism clearly spelt out.

Mr NGUYEN: Multiculturalism should be enshrined in law to indicate that the Government is committed to a society which is culturally diverse.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: The Government might argue that multiculturalism applies to all, therefore is it not better to name the commission the Community Relations Commission to reflect that it embraces everyone?

Mr NGUYEN: Could you reword your question?

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: You said that multiculturalism applies to all people in Australia. The Government proposes the name of the commission to be the Community Relations Commission of New South Wales. Principle No. 1 states that all individuals in New South Wales should have the greatest possible opportunity to contribute to and participate in all aspects of public life. Does that name not imply multiculturalism?

Mr NGUYEN: As I stressed before, the word "community" is too broad. It does not indicate the Government's commitment to multiculturalism. It could be anything. It could be a group of people who gather together to play sport or a social group. It does not reflect racial, religious or cultural backgrounds.

CHAIR: I realise that all witnesses are trying to work out what to add to the name Community Relations Commission. What would you like the commission to be called? For example would you like it to be called the New South Wales Multicultural Commission?

Mr NGUYEN: That is not the best one, however if the Government is committed to include the word "multicultural" to the name, that is the first time it has ever been embedded in law.

Miss DO: And fully endorsed.

(The witnesses withdrew) (Luncheon adjournment)

HARRY DANALIS, Solicitor, President of the Greek Orthodox Community of New South Wales, 206-210 Lakemba Street, Lakemba, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: In what capacity do you appear before the Committee today?

Mr DANALIS: As President of the Greek Orthodox community of New South Wales.

CHAIR: Did you receive a summons issued under my hand in accordance with the Parliamentary Evidence Act?

Mr DANALIS: Yes.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference for this inquiry?

Mr DANALIS: Yes.

CHAIR: If you wish to give any evidence we can take it in camera but it must be borne in mind that the Parliament has the power to override the decisions of this Committee and it could be made public. You wish to make an opening statement?

Mr DANALIS: I have read the bill. I have also read the second print of the bill today. The second print is an improvement on the first. In particular, the amendments made to the principles of multiculturalism go some way to answer some of the criticisms that I have of the first print of the bill. We, as an organisation, support the passing of the bill. We do, however, have one or two reservations about it. First, we think that the amendment that was made in the principle of multiculturalism should be made one of the objects of the commission. Rather than the four objectives that are there now with which we do not have any problems we think that if the amendment that was made to the principles of multiculturalism were embodied as an objective that would improve the bill.

The only other criticisms we have of the bill is the question in clause 3 (2) of tying up the question of citizenship. That gives us some problems in that it leaves an implication that in some sense multiculturalism is a divisive influence and, therefore, we need this statement in the bill "an overarching and unifying commitment to Australia ... " We think that in some sense by implication it leaves open the question that multiculturalism can be a factor working against unity whereas I think that is a wrong implication. The two criticisms that we have are: First, with respect to multiculturalism and being part of the objects of the commission; and, second, the tying up of this question of citizenship. As to the name, we would also prefer to have a name that embodies "multicultural" or "multiculturalism". We do not want to make too much of an issue of the name. If the bill was perfect we would not quibble with the name but we think it is advisable if the bill is about multiculturalism and about multicultural affairs that the name should embody that word.

CHAIR: The name of the commission?

Mr DANALIS: Yes.

CHAIR: How would you suggest that be done? Do you have any proposed wording?

Mr DANALIS: No, I have not got any proposed wording. I really have not given a thought to the name other than to suggest that it should be included, but I have not given any thought as to how that should be done.

CHAIR: If you have some thoughts later the Committee will be happy to receive a letter from you.

Mr DANALIS: Yes, that will be done.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: As a lawyer, do you have any concern about it being called the Ministry of Citizenship? Is it legally the right word for the Ministry or Minister? Does that imply the people who reside in New South Wales? Is it legally a problem to have a Minister of Citizenship in a State Government?

Mr DANALIS: The way I understand the use of the word "citizenship" is in the sense of being a good citizen of the State. I do not understand it has any connotation with respect to an Australian citizen. I do not have a problem with the words "citizenship" or "citizen" if it means that a person is a good citizen of the State. I have a problem with the tying up with clause 3 (2)(b).

CHAIR: Is it possible in relation to the part to which you refer, and I am not sure that this is the fact, that the Government is trying to include everybody, including those who have taken out Australian citizenship? There are still many people who have not taken out citizenship and I think sometimes the Greek community have dual citizenship. There are some people who do not do that. They are not disloyal. The bill is trying to bring everybody in. If you live in New South Wales then you are part of the society. It is not just the special citizenship group, or the very important person group who are formal Australian citizens but the other group, the second class citizen group, that is, every resident has a responsibility to contribute to a multicultural society. Is that also in that section?

Mr DANALIS: I do not know how it fits in. There is dual citizenship. If it is something intended to address that problem, that is, dual citizenship—

CHAIR: or people who do not take out citizenship—

Mr DANALIS: Yes, if that is the intent then I would not disagree with that intent.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Would it be more appropriate for an issue relating to citizenship to be in its own bill or legislation so that you get away from the possibility that it reflects only on the newly arrived? Citizenship is something, you would agree would you not, that affects everybody?

Mr DANALIS: Yes.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: In relation to the name, you indicated that you would prefer the word "multicultural" to be in the name of the commission? The name of the commission should have incorporated in it "multicultural" somewhere?

Mr DANALIS: Yes.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: You agree, as president of the Greek Orthodox Community of New South Wales and as somebody who has been heavily involved in ethnic affairs during the years, that the word "multicultural" is relevant if you are going to remove the word "ethnic"?

Mr DANALIS: I think names have a certain symbolism. It is relevant to include the name. I do not want to stress it too much because if the bill was perfect I would not have a problem with the name. Part of the bill is about community relations and multiculturalism, and the name should reflect that.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Those people who to relate to the bill, that is people of non-English-speaking background, would feel probably more secure that there needs were being attended to if the bill had a name such as multicultural?

Mr DANALIS: I would not go that far. It is more about symbolism than substance. Symbolism can be important. I would not go so far as to say that they would feel insecure or that it would be detrimental to them but I think some believe it is important and as part of symbolism the words should be included in the title.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: You mentioned about the ethnic affairs policy statement is that normal practice to put that into legislation? Do you want that included?

Mr DANALIS: No, if that is included in the objects of the bill that the commission has objectives to help promote, maintain, linguistic, religious, racial and ethnic heritage of the various groups that would go a long way in addressing that. If that then becomes an objective of the functions of the commission as they are spelt out in the bill to promote, enhance, retain, linguistic culture the bill would address my concerns. By putting the amendment that has gone in, it goes part of the way in addressing the problem. I would feel a lot happier if it was part of the objectives of the bill.

CHAIR: You mentioned there had been some improvements to the first print of the bill. Apparently the Premier has made a statement that he would now include as part of the title, "Community Relations Commission—For a Multicultural New South Wales" Are you aware of that statement of the Premier?

Mr DANALIS: No, I was not. I had heard that there was some proposal but I had not heard what exactly. To me that sounds at first satisfactory, yes. That sounds to me as if that would address the problem.

CHAIR: As long as they were both used together?

Mr DANALIS: Yes.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: You appreciate that would be on another line, a by-line?

Mr DANALIS: Do lines make a difference? Do we all have to be on the first line?

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Yes, because the meaning is also a little different. Bearing in mind that it is easier later to remove the second part of a title from a name and still have a name, would you be inclined to support the amended proposal from the Premier?

Mr DANALIS: Not only can the second line be removed by the Parliament but the first line and every line can be removed. If the Premier wants to later remove the second line, he could also remove the first line and could also repeal the bill. It then becomes a political issue. The substance is what matters. As I said, the name has a certain symbolism but it is the substance of the bill. If the substance of the bill is right and if the objectives are correct, I would be happy with a two-line title.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: The Committee has had a host of people expressing the opposite viewpoint. Bearing in mind that it would be easier to amend the name by dropping the second line, would you be still so inclined to support it?

Mr DANALIS: Can I answer by asking a question? Why is it easier to drop a second line and not a first line?

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: I can give you the answer to that, as I see it, because in people's minds the core name in the first line would be what they would remember most. I think that is a fair comment. If you accept that argument, would you not then see the by-line as being less significant?

Mr DANALIS: A name is a name. If we look at some of the bills in Parliament their names extend for lines. I am not that sensitive to the name. I am happy that the word multicultural or multiculturalism is in name. If the Premier of any government wanted to remove a name, there must be some political motive in wanting to do that. Then we have to question the Government's commitment to multiculturalism and to the bill. Therefore, if a government wanted to change the name of a bill, what would worry me is not the fact that they are changing the name, but what does it imply? Does it imply a withdrawal from the commitment to multiculturalism. That is what I would be looking at, not so much the change in the name. If they wanted to change the name to leave just the first part, I may be concerned, but I would then question their motives and whether it amounts to a back step on multiculturalism and multicultural affairs.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: As a practising solicitor and a person heavily involved in community matters, do you think that when people are referring to the committee they will constantly talk about the Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural New South Wales or will they just say, "You know that Commission for Community Relations" and leave it at that?

Mr DANALIS: I do not think that the average Australian goes around reciting the names of bills.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: The name of the commission we are talking about.

Mr DANALIS: Or the commission. I do not think they would go around reciting the name of the commission. I do not think it is relevant. If the policies are correct and implemented and if the objectives are right, that is what people would be worried about, not names.

CHAIR: People referred to the EAC when talking about the Ethnic Affairs Commission so they will probably refer to the commission as the CRC?

Mr DANALIS: Yes.

CHAIR: People will abbreviate the name most likely?

Mr DANALIS: Yes.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: If the name of the commission is the Community Relations Commission it is in the legislation itself and the Government cannot remove it without going back to the Parliament, a bit like the Ethnic Affairs Commission of New South Wales. Part of the problem is that the Government had to bring it back to get the Parliament's approval whereas a by-line is complementary to the Parliament and need not exist. The government of the day can remove it at any time without going through Parliament. In view of that, do you still support a by-line as a safe way or do you prefer the word being included in the name such as Community Relations and Multicultural Affairs Commission or do you prefer Community Relations Commission with a by-line "for multicultural New South Wales" or would you accept both?

Mr DANALIS: I will accept both. I think too much is being made of a name. What is in a name? I would accept either. I keep coming back to the question of the bill. I am concerned about the bill, its objectives being correct and its policies being implemented. As to the name, I think I can live with either.

CHAIR: You would agree perhaps to strengthen the term "for a multicultural New South Wales" the bill could be amended so that clause 6 simply includes "There is constituted by this Act a co-operation with the corporate name the Community Relations Commission of New South Wales"; to actually add those words into the title of the commission, which would mean that it could not be just dropped by a political decision but would require debate and amendments in Parliament.

Mr DANALIS: That is as I understood it. The name forms part of clause 6 (1) and the name becomes the whole of what we have been talking about, yes.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: The Government's commitment is that it is a by-line or a subtitle but not the full name because that allows the commission to deliver its work without a cumbersome and long name but all its publications, documentation and letterheads will include that. I understand you say that it would do the same job?

Mr DANALIS: I think so.

(The witness withdrew)

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: I would seek clarification from Catherine Chung, who is present, as to her capacity when she attended the meeting with the Premier.

CHAIR: We will have to provide a request in writing to her to appear as a witness, there being no objection from members of the Committee or from Catherine herself.

TONY PUN, Finance Broker, Chairman, Committee for Community Relations Commission and Principles of Multiculturalism Bill 1999 and Chairman, Chinese Australian Union, Level 7, 62 Pitt Street, Sydney, sworn and examined, and:

KENNETH KWOK, Director, and President of the Australian Chinese Community Association, Suite 2, Level 2, 377 Sussex Street, Sydney, and

JEFFERY NG, Senior Systems Analyst and President of Chinese Youth League of Australia, P. O. Box K313, Haymarket, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Did you each receive a summons issued under my hand in accordance with the provisions of the Parliamentary Evidence Act 1901?

Dr PUN: Yes.

Mr KWOK: Yes, I did.

Mr NG: Yes, I did.

CHAIR: Are you each conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Dr PUN: Yes.

Mr KWOK: Yes, I am.

Mr NG: Yes.

CHAIR: Do any of you wish to make a statement to the Committee?

Mr KWOK: We each come from different associations. The Australian Chinese community associations have about 6,000 members and have been established since 1974. We have the Chinese Australian Forum, the Chinese Australian Services Society Co-operative Ltd, the Chinese Australian Union and the Chinese Youth League of Australia. This is a cross-section of the communities that we represent. The reason for us coming together with the Chinese Australian Forum and all the other associations, despite our differences, is that we are concerned that the disagreement over the name change is stalling the passage of the bill.

We support the proposal to adopt the byline, which is for a multicultural New South Wales. This byline reflects the spirit of the bill and underscores the commission's commitment to multiculturalism. The byline is complementary to the inclusive nature of the name of the Community Relations Commission and highlights the role and importance of multiculturalism in achieving and maintaining harmonious relations amongst the diverse communities of New South Wales. Therefore we urge the Parliament to demonstrate, in legislation and in practice, its support for multicultural New

South Wales by championing the passage of this important bill. We are very concerned that divisiveness of the bill will be damaging to the welfare of the people of New South Wales.

Mr NG: The Committee got together in support of the bill and its contents. The Committee is very supportive of the bill enshrining multiculturalism in legislation. It supports the principle of English as a primary language and as a common language, and bringing the importance of English as the official language and not denigrating the languages of other communities. It also supports the expansion of the consultative structures to include regional and local sectors, and it reaches every sector of the community.

Dr PUN: To add to what my colleagues have said, my background is a little different. I have been involved in ethnic affairs for some time, and I would say that I have a pretty rounded education of multiculturalism since its inception in the 1970s. My humble definition of multiculturalism would be an inclusive and harmonious one. Multicultural Australia means that we recognise and cherish the following Australian values: English as the common language; the parliamentary system of democracy; and a good judicial system and education system.

As immigrants we have adopted these Australian values and have the right to share with other Australians the culture, traditions and language of my country of origin. The core values I have just described give me the opportunity to fully participate in all aspects of Australian life, and in particular in decision-making bodies. We do not wish to see Australia divided into English and non-English speaking backgrounds. We strongly support this multicultural bill because it gives us the opportunity to do what I have mentioned. I come here to plead not just with this Committee but with all parties concerned. We in the Chinese Australian community would like to see all parties in support of this bill, because that is the only way this bill will live forever in the statute books of New South Wales.

CHAIR: The Premier issued a press release in which he announced that he would support and include the term "For a Multicultural New South Wales" with regard to the commission's name and also that it be asserted in the new commission's promotional and presentation materials. I note that you suggested that solution in your letter to the Premier dated 28 January because of your concern about the passage of the bill, and that the Premier accepted your proposal.

Mr KWOK: That is correct.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Dr Pun, you are aware, are you not, that the Ethnic Affairs Commission was set up in 1979 by the Wran Government for the purpose, among other things, of providing for the needs of people of non-English speaking backgrounds?

Dr PUN: Yes.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Have you read the speeches attached to that legislation at the time?

Dr PUN: I have not read that speech, but I have been to many meetings where the speech was quoted in different contexts.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Do you believe that the Ethnic Affairs Commission has, since then, played an important role in attending to the needs of the newly arrived?

Dr PUN: I believe that the commission, up until now, has done its job satisfactorily.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Knowing the change of demography between 1979 and now, would you be prepared to say that there is still a need for the commission to relate to people of non-English speaking background in terms of services?

Dr PUN: There is always a need for services to people of non-English speaking background. However, as the time passes the need is much more for people from the emerging nations, the smaller community groups. The larger ones—that is, the Chinese, the Greeks, the Italians and the Jewish—have been very sophisticated and they have matured very well in this society. They possibly do not need the kind of services you describe as much as people from the emerging nations need them.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: But they still have a need, would you not agree, particularly with regard to senior citizens?

Dr PUN: Yes. I do not disagree that the need is always there. But I do not know to what degree the need is there compared to 20 years ago.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Is it your perception that over those years people of non-English speaking background have related well to the name of the Ethnic Affairs Commission?

Dr PUN: I think over the years the Ethnic Affairs Commission has done its job. However, in the last five years, for example, or even most recently since the emergence of One Nation, from Chinese community point of view the term "ethnic" has been degraded and bastardised.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: In terms of services, would you not agree that the commission has an expanding role, bearing in mind that its establishment strength has gone from 79 to approximately 100?

Dr PUN: I will not disagree with you.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: That being the case, would you not think it important that the word "ethnic" remain in the name, or, as an alternative, that the word "multicultural" be included in the name of the Community Relations Commission?

Dr PUN: We have said that the word "ethnic" has created a divide between us and them. In our community, particularly the Chinese community, we have felt that the word "ethnic" puts us in the position of a second-class citizen. This is our viewpoint. Not all ethnic communities are affected in the same way. I have very good community friends who have said to me that there are very good reasons for retaining the word "ethnic", but we do not think so. As for multiculturalism, the position we have taken in the community is that we accept the name change and we have suggested that the byline be used. We did so because we felt that as a pragmatic people we need the bill much more than its name. If the bill is there, it becomes enshrined in legislation, it is a good step for us, and we will treasure it forever. Because our spirit, sincerity and hope are distilled in the bill, we are not too worried about the name of the commission.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: If, however, the Premier were to say, "Look, I have changed my mind. I am going to put in "Community Relations and Multicultural Commission", would you see that as a better situation?

Dr PUN: If Parliament wishes to add the name to it, I think the people of New South Wales will be happy to follow Parliament's wishes, because we elected them in the first place.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: But would you be happier with the position of the name as I have suggested?

Dr PUN: Our minimum position was to accept the name as it is. If Parliament wishes to put the word "multicultural" in the name of the commission, we would have no objections.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: This morning we had a number of Chinese groups here— probably the biggest gathering we have had since the committee has sat.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: We had two busloads.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: I am informed that two busloads attended. They had a diametrically opposed view to yours in this regard. Would that not reflect a division within the Chinese community as to the importance of the name?

Dr PUN: I do not understand how you divide the Chinese community, whether two busloads are equal to three people sitting here, or six of us are equal to two boatloads.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: But they were from a number of associations.

Dr PUN: The Chinese community is credited with having 200 organisations. You know that the Greek community is about the same. We are a very diversified people, and everybody wants to be the president—that is why there are so many organisations. This is a form of organised chaos. To be serious, within our community, if people wish to come up in busloads and say these things, that is fine. But the fact is that—

CHAIR: I must make it clear that the busloads of people did not speak; they simply sat here.

Dr PUN: I am just saying that we did not feel the urge to organise the busloads.

CHAIR: The busloads of people could have agreed with your statement—I do not know. They were simply visitors.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: I would like to clarify some of the statements made by some of the previous witnesses. The statement was made that there were actually two committees, including the earlier one comprising six or seven organisations.

Mr KWOK: Yes.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: There was some connotation that it was politically driven and Dr Ng clarified to say that he met spontaneously. Can you tell us the circumstances? Was it politically driven? Are you under threat or coerced? Can you tell us the circumstances of how it happened? Later there was another meeting where he met with the Premier and further statements were made that in that meeting it was undemocratic, various things were said about the Premier and how it was portrayed. Can you also outline the circumstances and how the people went there and how the Premier could relay that in the speech?

CHAIR: We now have the summons for Ms Chung. Are you happy for her to be here, as some of the questions relate to her directly?

Mr KWOK: Yes.

CATHERINE CHUNG, Solicitor, Suite 201, 683-689 George Street Sydney, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: In what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Ms CHUNG: As secretary of the Committee for the Community Relations Commission and Principles of Multiculturalism Bill.

CHAIR: Did you receive a summons issued under my hand in accordance with the Parliamentary Evidence Act 1901?

Ms CHUNG: Yes, I did.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Ms CHUNG: Yes, I am.

Mr KWOK: To answer the first part of your question, as I said earlier, we come together with a common goal. The common goal is not under any threat or political influence. I come from a background representing our community. I have no political interest or no political agenda in that sense. We want to see the substance of the bill, hope that the bill can pass through to entrench in the legislation multiculturalism. Therefore, all these six organisations come together voluntarily to suggest to the Premier to add a by-line "for Multiculturalism for New South Wales." Hopefully, that will have the legislation passed through.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: The subsequent meeting thereafter, where you have a number of organisations, can you tell me how you got together? Was it under circumstances like a political party meeting? How did you get to see the Premier?

CHAIR: This is the meeting here in Parliament House that you are referring to?

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: No, I was referring to what the previous witness said, there were only two organisations and they only signed the thing and were not part of the thing. I want to know the circumstances and what happened in the meeting.

CHAIR: Was that meeting at Parliament House, though?

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: Where was it?

Mr KWOK: No. 1 Farrar Place, level 42.

CHAIR: The Premier's office?

Mr KWOK: The Premier's office. We came together. To have the Committee aware of what we were doing, the purpose of what we were doing was having a by-line and all those associations came voluntarily and agreed to the suggestion of the by-line, and that is very important. That was not because of political influence, which may be suggested by other people today or according to Mr Tsang. We got 38 associations and now we have another one, called the Australian-Taiwan Women's Association. We all support the by-line and the substance of the bill.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: Can you have a copy of that signed by whatever the organisation is and tender it as part of the submission?

Dr PUN: The committee has given a submission. It is appendix 2.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: I do not think it was signed.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: What I am trying to say, there were accusations about the Premier. The Premier was based on that document when he issued the press release or referred to in his parliamentary speech.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: I am saying the same thing.

CHAIR: Just a moment, let the Hon. H. S. Tsang finish his point.

Ms CHUNG: May I answer the question? The second meeting was organised to express to the Premier the views of the Chinese community on this bill. The meeting was initiated by the committee and the committee members spoke to other community leaders and sought their views on this bill. They were told there would be a meeting on a certain date to meet with the Premier to express their support for the bill. Other community organisations were invited to attend the meeting if they were also of the view that they were in support of the bill and our position of suggesting a by-line be added. All the people who attended the meeting said that they were aware of the position the committee was going to put to the Premier.

An attendance list was also signed by all the attendants. Because everyone was told of the position before they came to the meeting, we assumed that anyone who came along was in support of the bill. It was also advised to the people attending if they had alternative views on the bill they should make them known at the meeting because it was an open meeting. Everyone had an equal chance of having their say. I was present at the meeting on that day and I did not hear of any dissenting views and I have to vouch that there was not any attempt to stop anyone from expressing their views.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: The statement also said that you, in particular, were the deputy chair when you met with the Premier. Were you the deputy chair or were you representing the community, not the commission?

Ms CHUNG: When we met with the Premier I had already finished my term with the Ethnic Affairs Commission. I was no longer the deputy chair of the commission at that time. I was the deputy chair of the Ethnic Affairs Commission at the first meeting when the original six organisations met. How did that meeting come about? As deputy chair, of course, I was aware of the progress of this bill, that it was before Parliament and that after all the lengthy consultations nothing much was happening with the bill. There was a lot of talk that the bill was being delayed because there was strong opposition to the bill, especially to the name change. As a commissioner I thought it was my duty to seek out the views of the community. Coming from the a Chinese background, I know the Chinese community well and I have worked with a lot of the community leaders.

I organised a meeting to find out what all these community leaders thought about the bill. They all said at the meeting, without my prompting, that they supported the intention and the substance of the bill, and on the issue of the name they all agreed that although the name is an important symbol of the Government's commitment to multiculturalism, it should not be an obstacle to the bill's passage and should not be used to derail the reform process. It was at that meeting that the suggestion came up that we support the idea of a by-line as suggested by Mr Neville Roach, and the committee came up with the by-line, "for a Multicultural New South Wales" and so the committee wrote off to the Premier and the Premier accepted our suggestion.

I have to say that the committee is not politically motivated, because, apart from meeting the Premier, the committee also sought meetings with and did meet with Mrs Kerry Chikarovski, the Leader of the Opposition, and Mr George Souris, the Leader of the National Party, as well as members of the cross benches, to put our views and suggestions. As Dr Pun said earlier, we want to work with all political parties to see this bill passed so that the commission can have expanded powers to carry on its functions.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: The other thing that was stated by the previous witness was that Tony Pun is a Labor Party member and there might be other people who are members of political parties. So, Tony, are you a member, are you motivated and did you stack the committee as is inferred?

CHAIR: It is up to you whether you wish to answer that question.

Dr PUN: I wouldn't mind answering the question, because I think it will reinforce my argument. If they say I am a member of the Labor Party, yes, I am member of the Labor Party. Mr Samios knows that I have been a member of the Labor Party for many years. But in community issues, my integrity, my reputation, on non-partisan political issues, with the Ethnic Affairs Commission or any community organisations, have always been immaculate. Even Mr John Fahey paid respect to me. He said, "Dr Pun, whose name of the political party I refused to mention, has done a great job for the community." I have praises from the National Party and Liberal Party, who said I did my job in a non-partisan way. I am proud of my track record.

As far as this issue is concerned, we got together. There are a lot of people with different party political views within the community, and we got together because we disbanded all this political staff and said this was a bill we should be involved in, let us put our heads together and work on it. Do not worry about politics, we want the next incoming government, whether it is the Labor Party or the Liberal Party, to keep this bill because it is good. So, I do not mind answering that. People have asked me, "Ah Pun, why are you doing this for the Labor Party, haven't they done enough against you?". That is not the point. The point is I have always done what I think is right for my community, and my political affiliation has always come second. So, in this and other aspects my small contribution to this community has been an honourable one.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Ms Chung, you made reference to the fear that the delay in the passing of the bill would derail the bill. Why would you think that when the issue of the name could be resolved by amending the bill? At least, that has been the position that the Coalition has indicated in the lower House. So, with your knowledge of the parliamentary process and as a distinguished solicitor, why would you feel that the issue of the name, if unresolved, would result in the bill being derailed?

Ms CHUNG: The arguments centred only on the name. Firstly, there is a danger that attention is taken away from the substance of the bill. That is the first issue. Secondly, on the derailment question, there was a lot of talk of objecting to the bill on the issue of the name, and that was the only objection to the bill that I have heard of up till now. The Government is very firm on its position on the name, that it is not negotiable, the Community Relations Commission. On the other side some people are voicing strong objections because of the name. It seems that the Government was reluctant to table the bill or bring it to debate if there was no cross-section support for it. If the bill is not debated then it will not be passed. The longer it takes I can see that the Government may lose interest in it. The Government is political and may think it is all too difficult. Then we have lost a good opportunity to improve the workings of the commission. The longer the bill sits there arguing just over the name, ignoring the substance of the bill, it is to the detriment of the community.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Therefore, the Government sees the name as being pivotal to the whole legislation, is that what you are saying?

Ms CHUNG: I have no knowledge of what the Government thinks.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: It is so pivotal that it would not proceed with the bill if it could not get agreement on the name, is that what you are saying?

Ms CHUNG: I do not have knowledge of the Government's working. From what I have heard from the community, the bill is being delayed because of the name issue. We can see the name is a very important issue in so far as the bill is concerned, otherwise we would not be sitting here, we would not have all these organisations coming here to talk about the name. So, it must be pivotal for the parliamentarians.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: You said earlier the Government was firm its position on the name. Subsequently you said you are not the Government and you are not sure what the position is. What is your answer?

Ms CHUNG: As a commissioner I know the process of the bill. It went into the Parliament in October. It was announced in April or May last year after the State election. I was aware of the process but I really do not know, as I was saying to the Hon. J. M. Samios, the thinking of the Government. I would have no idea. I am not privy to its thinking. But I was aware of how long the process was taking.

CHAIR: The witness can give only her views. We need to question the Government about its views.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: I understand that. I am not forcing her to understand that. It is an example of what she said; I wrote down what she said. Dr Pun, I appreciate you are trying very hard with this issue. You were saying, rightly, if the Parliament sees fit to add the word "multicultural" to the name of the Community Relations Commission you would be happy with it?

Dr PUN: I did not say that.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: What did you say?

Dr PUN: I said I would accept the parliamentary decision. That is what I said.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Would the addition of the word "multicultural" to the name so that it reads "Community Relations and Multicultural Affairs Commission" be acceptable to you?

Dr PUN: For me to accept Parliament's wishes—

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: For you personally.

Dr PUN: Presently it is no different. I am saying if I accept Parliament's decision, I accept it personally.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: Are you not saying that the sentiment of your committee is not reliant on the derailment of the bill? You mean the Government has options. One option is to defer and not deal with it because in the Chinese community media it said that certain members of Parliament defeated the bill. That is what the Chinese community understands. It was not defeated. The Government could defer the bill and not deal with it. My question refers to the derailment of the bill. Does it mean also that with the goodwill of the Government you can have whatever you want? With the goodwill of the Executive Government you are delivering whatever is in the bill, which is important. Therefore, with the good sense of the community you seek to work out a solution to create goodwill so the Government can deliver services?

Dr PUN: The way I see it is this: We see a set of legislation which has tremendous benefit not only to the Australian Chinese community but the whole of New South Wales. We are not in the position to second-guess what the Government, the Opposition or what Parliament would do. We only say this to you, that we wanted the bill. We wanted it badly and we would go to a certain extent to

ensure that the bill will not be shelved. We have no line to the Government, what it is thinking and what it will not do. We are saying that we want the bill. We do not want you to shelve it. That is why we took control of it and said we want ownership of this bill now. We said to the Government, "We are prepared to talk. We like the bill." So, we are not going to give anybody the chance to have the bill shelved because we will never see it for another 10 years.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Would that not indicate a vindictive attitude by the Government if you shelved it to for 10 years?

Dr PUN: I am not hear to pass comment on what the Government may or may not do. We are saying we do not want to lose it. That is all it is.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Do you seriously suggest that you would lose the bill because a by-line would not be advanced into the core of the name if the amendment went through?

Dr PUN: No. I am saying that if the debate on the name is so ferocious and too pivotal in the sense that it would tip something, if the Government decided, "Okay, it's too hard, "We will not go through with it", then we have lost it.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: But the Government has agreed to include the word "multicultural" into a by-line.

Dr PUN: Only after we took ownership of the bill and said we want to start negotiating with the Government. Not before that. The reason we went into this was that we wanted the bill. We actively sought the bill. If we did nothing we could have lost it. Who knows.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: I commend you for taking the initiative to get the word "multicultural" put into a by-line, but we are saying to advance the word "multicultural" from the by-line into the core of the name would cause the bill to be derailed for 10 years and you tell me that that is not vindictive.

Dr PUN: I am not saying that. I did not say that.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: You implied it.

CHAIR: The witness is saying that he does not know. He is fearful of what could happen. Ms Chung made the point earlier that the bill had been sitting for a long time and going by previous governments of all persuasions, sometimes the bill then lapses, which is not unusual. That is the reason for the basis of your fear, is that right?

Ms CHUNG: Certainly. There is no unanimous view in the Chinese community. Even in the wider community it is not unanimous. We are not 100 per cent in agreement on the name or any issue. We can never get everyone to agree on everything. Our committee sees that there are diverse views. Some people support the name. They genuinely see "Community Relations Commission" as a good name as society has changed. Others object strongly to it for very good reasons. Then there are many others who do not mind what name the commission is called provided it performs, achieves its objectives and fulfils its functions.

Our committee has no problem whatsoever in accepting the name "Community Relations Commission". I want to advance this bill. We have suggested the by-line as a compromise. We hope that with the by-line we can help bridge differences between those who want the name "Community Relations Commission" and those who want the name to contain the word "multicultural". We see this as a compromise position. This is where we are coming from. We are not supporting any one side

politically. We are not saying we have to have this particular name or another or that we support this name or we are against another. We are here to see the passage of this bill. We put forward our by-line as a compromise for all sides to consider.

CHAIR: It is clear that your committee is focusing on the content of the bill as its main objective?

Mr NG: That is right. The committee sees the content of the bill as the focus. What we have so far heard is that there was no objection to the bill. We want to see the implementation and delivery of the bill and its content in services, and change the focus from the name into the content of the bill. There is no problem in accepting the name. We have suggested also a compromise so that we can bring everyone together and make sure the bill gets passed.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: I have a question for Mr Kwok. Bearing in mind that in the lower House debate nobody in the Government has it entrusted in their thoughts that it must have the name "Community Relations Commission". Would you object to the use of the word "multicultural" in the name "Community Relations Commission" as suggested by the Hon. Helen Sham-Ho, so it is to be known as the Community Relations and Multicultural Affairs Commission?

Mr KWOK: We have all spoken again and again about the name. We recommended the name with a by-line. The Premier actually gave the words and accepted the by-line. If the bill can be passed in a bipartisan way, the name will not change. Bills always have a by-line. If everyone in the Parliament agrees to the name change, we will accept that as well, as we indicated earlier. There is too much politics being played with the name rather than with the substance of the bill, which is the most important part for the committee to decide.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: Previous witnesses said this group is not representative. I ask Dr Pun particularly, what organisation do you represent? Reference was made to the western part of Sydney. Does your organisation have members in the western suburbs?

Mr NG: In Chinese communities we have organised various activities. People who attend come from all directions. There is no representation of where they come from. They take part in our activities, whether it is sport or cultural. Our activities are extended to regional areas like Young and Griffith in promoting and fostering multiculturalism. In that way we have interaction with people within our area and what their views are and how they take the multicultural aspects of the community as belonging to the whole community.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: What would be the number of your members?

CHAIR: Perhaps you could take that question on notice. I would ask you to forward the Committee a letter from each of your groups represented here outlining the membership.

Mr KWOK: This is a part of our submission in appendix 1.

Ms CHUNG: Today in earlier proceedings and perhaps during yesterday's hearing certain statements have been made regarding our committee or individual members of it. Could we have a copy of the transcript so that we may respond to those statements in writing to the Committee to clarify any points.

CHAIR: The *Hansard* of this Committee is a public document, when we vote to make it available to the public, which is normally what happens. You will have access to it when we receive it. As yet we have not seen the transcript. The transcript of yesterday's hearing may be available tomorrow.

Ms CHUNG: Can we make a submission?

CHAIR: Yes, if you wish to write to the Committee to further respond or clarify, we are happy for you to do that. Do have any other documents you want to table to the Committee?

Ms CHUNG: No.

CHAIR: We have your submission and your statements are on the record. Thank you for appearing and for your concerns.

(The witnesses withdrew)

MYRIAM BAHARI, Non-English Speaking Background Youth Development Officer, Suite 209, Level 2, Bridgegate House, 410 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills, sworn and examined, and

MONICA MAZZONE, Indochinese Youth Policy Worker, Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre, Corner Railway Parade and McBurney Road, Cabramatta, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: In what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Ms BAHARI: As an employee of the Youth Action and Policy Association

Ms MAZZONE: As an employee of the Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre and a member of the NESB Youth Issues Network.

CHAIR: Did you receive a summons issued under my hand in accordance with provisions of the Parliamentary Evidence Act 1901?

Ms BAHARI: Yes, I did.

Ms MAZZONE: Yes.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Ms BAHARI: Yes, I am.

Ms MAZZONE: Yes, I am.

CHAIR: Do you wish to make an opening statements?

Ms BAHARI: I would like to thank the Committee for allowing us to come and speak on behalf of non-English speaking background [NESB] young people and raise issues regarding young people from a culturally diverse background. The submission that was sent has been prepared by the NESB Youth Issues Network [NYIN], which is a statewide youth network that has been established since 1996 that looks at any NESB young people's needs and issues, develops statements according to those issues, passes them on to governments, as well as assist non-government organisations that work with NESB young people. We also run forums and produce documents in an attempt to encourage access and equity.

NYIN it is convened and supported by the Youth Action and Policy Association [YAPA], which I am an employee of as the NESB youth development worker. YAPA is A statewide youth organisation which assists young people in New South Wales to achieve a more equitable status in government decisions, actions and access to social resources. YAPA does this by co-ordinating forums and actions on social change and equity for young people. YAPA is guided by the views, ideas and opinions of young people and youth services that are regularly consulted and involved in all aspects of YAPA.

Ms MAZZONE: I am from the Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre, which for many years has offered a range of services for migrants in aged care, youth and domestic violence support. I am the Indochinese youth policy officer. I do development work with Indochinese young people in general but also work with NESB young people in the Fairfield area. We would like to raise some of our concerns about the community relations bill. The first one is the change of name from the Ethnic Affairs Commission [EAC] to Community Relations Commission. There is some community concern as to why there is a need for this change of name. The migrant community identifies with the Ethnic Affairs

Commission. They have heard this name and they know it. They have an understanding as to what it does and how it can assist them. Community Relations Commission means nothing to them; it has no connection to migrants or to multiculturalism.

For example, if someone wants to find a state authority for multiculturalism or one that deals in migrant issues in New South Wales and they try to look for it in a phone directory, they will not find the Community Relations Commission because they could be looking under "ethnic" or "multicultural". Nobody would think of looking under "community relations" for these kinds of issues. That is a practical example of how the change of name could impact on the access by ethnic communities to the commission. We do not object to the changes and improvements to the Ethnic Affairs Commission, but we do not understand why there has to be a name change. We do not understand why the name cannot be retained. If the name has to be changed why can the name not have "ethnic" or "multicultural" in it so that it is clear what the commission is for. It is important for migrant communities to have the word "ethnic", "multicultural" or "migrant" in the official title of the commission so that they feel part of the community and that there is a government authority that looks after their needs. The change of name loses the focus on migrant and ethnic issues. It does not show the same commitment to the ethnic communities that the current name does.

Ms BAHARI: Listening to the previous speakers who gave evidence about the enhanced role of the commission by changing the legislation, perhaps I have not read the bill sufficiently. I cannot see what the changes are, what the changes will be, how they will benefit not only the migrant community but the community as a whole. What are the changes? Perhaps I am not reading it properly, but I cannot see that there are any changes. If there are changes, they need to be made a lot more clear for people to understand what they are. They need to be transparent rather than global. Many of the statements are broad. I understand that they need to be broad to encompass lots of things, but sometimes broadness also isolates people and eliminates situations.

It also could be interpreted that multiculturalism is not an in word anymore, that being a migrant or an ethnic does not deserve recognition within government. The Premier has already changed his portfolio to the Minister for Citizenship. Citizenship is a responsibility and a right of everybody, it is not only for migrants. That again reduces the importance or the commitment to migrants in our community. The promotion of multiculturalism is not in the objectives of the proposed changes. We see that as an issue. Subclause (b) of clause 12 of part 3, Objectives and functions of the Commission, states:

access to government services that is appropriate in a multicultural society.

It does not say anything about promoting multiculturalism and the benefits it gives to society and our community, about how young people benefit from us acknowledging multiculturalism because it reinforces what they are getting at home. It gives them a place to belong by acknowledging that multiculturalism is important, so that they do not feel further isolated from the community. Because the legislation is so broad it could exclude the accessing of non-government services that promote multiculturalism and cultural diversity. The objectives and the functions are very insular about promoting the government authorities, rather than looking at how they can work with the community and resource the community, how they can become more accessible and equitable for the community as a whole. The objectives do not look at social justice, cultural development or economic development for ethnic communities, which was a priority in the Ethnic Affairs Plan 2000 which was completed in 1996.

Ms MAZZONE: Within the functions of the commission there needs to be a better statement relating to the translation and interpreting function of the commission. In the proposed bill it merely says "provide interpreter or other services approved by the Minister". However, it does not say anything about translation and also it seems to leave it up to the discretion of the Minister. This may

not be a priority, whereas at the moment services for translators and interpreters are highly valued in the community and are very important.

Ms BAHARI: I want to add more about the translations. We encourage youth services to get translations and know how to use the interpreting services so that their parents understand what the youth services are doing and feel confident that their children are going to a reputable service. Access to translation services helps in young people in the use of mainstream services. There is also no mention in the functions of the grants that the EAC currently provides. I am not sure of the bucket but the EAC provides a certain amount of money each year. That seems to change each year according to the needs in the community and the consultations. The lack of that written in as a function is a concern to the community, particularly for youth services, where a lot of innovative youth programs have been developed with that funding.

Currently there is a project running at the cinema complex at Wetherill Park which is looking at young people and the use of public space. It is an innovative project. Without the extra resources there will be a big hole, a gap in the community. Currently the EAC does the ethnic access policies statements, which are presented to Parliament every year around February or March. The legislation changes refer to reporting to the Government, but they do not specifically refer to an ethnic affairs policy statement [EAPS] report. The legislation talks about reporting to the Government about how various authorities are dealing with cultural diversity within their departments. That is ambiguous and we are not sure what that really means. Crosschecking, making government organisations accountable to providing culturally diverse programs and activities, making sure that the information is understood by a cross-section of the community, including people who cannot read or speak English, are very important. That is not made clear in the new legislation.

Ms MAZZONE: The functions of the commission state that it has to encourage eligible people to become Australian citizens. We see that more as a Federal concern than a State concern. We are afraid that resources could be taken away from other aspects of the commission which we consider are more important, such as to promote multiculturalism and access and equity to government and non-government services. Those resources could be taken away from other aspects of the commission which are more important; for example, the promotion of multiculturalism and access and equity to government and non-government services. Those resources are to be diverted to promote people taking up citizenship, which is a Federal issue. Regarding citizenship, mentioned on page 3 of the preliminary, it is very confusing because under "Function" it is mentioned as legal citizenship, such as becoming a legal citizen with an Australian passport.

However, in the preliminary it is described in a broader sense. That causes confusion and that enlarged concept of citizenship might not necessarily be something that people are familiar with, especially those who do not have a Western background. That concept is a Greek-Roman idea. Having the same words used for two different things in the same bill would definitely create confusion for migrants. On another issue, resources, it looks like there will be expanded roles for the commission but the bill does not say that extra resources are to be given. Again, we are afraid that the commission's functions will suffer.

Ms BAHARI: There are implications with the reduction of commissioners from 15 to nine. What would that mean for direct community input to the commissioners? Fifteen is not really representative of the community but at least it is better than nine. Multiculturalism is being watered down and the concept of cultural diversity is not seen favourably by the Government to appease a few people within society who do not see the benefits of multiculturalism. Rather than educating them on the benefits of multiculturalism there needs to be a strong statement by the Government of its commitment to multiculturalism and the contribution that migrants and second-generation people contribute to New South Wales society.

CHAIR: Thank you for your comprehensive statements, they have been most helpful.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Would you agree that the work you have been involved in with youth, whatever group, over the years has taken you to the front line of multicultural activity in this State?

Ms MAZZONE: What you mean by front line?

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: That you are dealing with issues relating to people of non-English-speaking backgrounds and issues that concern them and are important to their wellbeing?

Ms MAZZONE: Yes.

Ms BAHARI: Yes, for example, young people born in another country or brought up by parents who were born in another country, are torn between two cultures. Sometimes the values and the way the family interprets things are different. If there is more of an understanding and acceptance of cultural differences that may make the cultural conflict less.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Are you saying that multiculturalism provides that?

Ms BAHARI: Yes, that is right.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: We all have an interest in multiculturalism because it provides for the wellbeing of society, in terms of social cohesion. Is that what you are saying?

Ms MAZZONE: Yes.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: You have indicated that this bill is a potpourri of initiatives which can be confusing to the role of the Government in ethnic affairs. It does not provide for a focused role for the commission. Do you agree?

Ms MAZZONE: Yes, and especially that the promotion of multiculturalism is not one of the stated objectives.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Yes, and not just the name, but the bill itself. The bill is not focus because, as you said, it introduces other issues of citizenship. Do you agree that that is a Federal initiative?

Ms BAHARI: Yes.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Do you not see this as a potpourri that is not focused on the success of multiculturalism?

Ms BAHARI: Yes, that is true. It does not smell very nice either. It is too broad and ambiguous.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Do you agree that youth, who represent the future of this company, need a strong indication from the Government that multiculturalism is here to stay as a binding philosophy?

Ms MAZZONE: Yes.

Ms BAHARI: Yes, considering that the Premier is also responsible for youth affairs as well as the Minister for Citizenship. That needs to be emphasised loud and clear.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: How do youth react to the Minister walking away from his portfolio of multicultural affairs and calling itself the Minister for Citizenship? Is that seen as beneficial?

Ms BAHARI: I think they feel a little outside that circle, they do not feel part of the political process so they may not have thought about that change. It is not something they think about.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: You indicated that you are not happy with a name change. Do you also agree that the name change sends a clear signal to the community of shyness by the Government about multiculturalism?

Ms BAHARI: Because "multicultural" or "ethnic" or "migrant" it is not in the title, it does not acknowledge the migrant community.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Are you aware that the Premier has announced his acceptance of the Community Relations Commission with the byline "for Multicultural New South Wales"?

Ms MAZZONE: We are aware of it, but previously I gave the example that if you are looking for the commission in the telephone directory it will not have that byline.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Absolutely.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: I agree with you that it is very broad. Would you like the ethnic affairs policy statement [EAPS] and access equity to be placed more firmly into the legislation?

Ms BAHARI: Yes, definitely.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Obviously you would also like more emphasis into the promotion of multiculturalism?

Ms BAHARI: Yes, promoting it within government but also promoting it within other community groups and non-government organisations.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: You would also like a funding grant to be enshrined, not in amount but in principle?

Ms BAHARI: Yes.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Would you see the reduction of commissioners from 15 to nine as a retrograde step, bearing in mind that the bill is supposed to produce greater resources for the commission?

Ms MAZZONE: We did say that we do not see how we can have greater success by reducing the number of commissioners.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: Are you aware that all public companies, bodies, and local government are reducing numbers to a more manageable level for decision making?

Ms MAZZONE: Yes and we are also aware that that is not necessarily a good thing.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Furthermore, reducing the commissioners from 15 to nine and appointing them for five years, would you see that as unnecessary, bearing in mind that three years is the normal period for appointment?

Ms BAHARI: We have not gone into that in great detail.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Are you aware of the Western Region Advisory Council of the Ethnic Affairs Commission?

Ms BAHARI: Yes.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: What happened to it?

Ms BAHARI: It disappeared.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: What you say that the Government is reinventing the wheel?

Ms BAHARI: About getting regional offices up and running?

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Yes.

Ms BAHARI: On a personal note, when I was working at YAPA in western Sydney, in Blacktown-Mount Druitt area, we often used the EAC facilities for meetings. To have someone there to attend meetings and to be an active member of the community was very valuable. Once that office left, we missed it a great deal.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Are you aware that it was closed because of lack of funding?

Ms BAHARI: We suspected it was closed because of lack of funding, but we were never told.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Yes it was, I was a commissioner at the time.

CHAIR: Earlier you said that you were not sure what extra benefits this bill has on the previous bill. Have you compared the two bills?

Ms BAHARI: No, I admit I have not.

CHAIR: You would not pick up a change in the new bill unless you looked at the old bill.

Ms BAHARI: The current functions of the EAC and what the bill suggests it will do, is not very different. Its role, its workers and its policies are not much different.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Particularly in relation to regional affairs?

Ms BAHARI: I do not have a lot of knowledge about that.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Are you satisfied that the bill provides for the appointment of people of non-English-speaking backgrounds to regional bodies?

Ms BAHARI: I do not have any information on that.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Have you referred any clients through EAC to the Anti-Discrimination Board in the past?

Ms BAHARI: Yes, I have referred them to the Anti-Discrimination Board.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: But not through the EAC?

Ms BAHARI: No.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Now that the new commission may have that power, and let us be fair to the Government, you did note an improvement?

Ms BAHARI: Could I make a referral straight to the Anti-Discrimination Board or do we have to go through EAC?

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Through the new commission.

Ms BAHARI: I do not know. I will have to find out what the procedure is, whether it is another hoop to jump through before we get to the Anti-Discrimination Board.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: It aims to give support into research and background.

Ms BAHARI: Okay.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Is it your impression that this bill will only confuse youth in relation to the change of name?

Ms BAHARI: Yes.

Ms MAZZONE: Yes. The name does not indicate who the commission is for.

(The witnesses withdrew)

BARBEL WINTER, Executive Director, Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association, 181 Church Street, Parramatta, 181 Church Street, Parramatta, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Did you receive a summons issued under my hand under the Parliamentary Evidence Act 1901?

Ms WINTER: Yes, and I am familiar with the terms of reference of this inquiry.

CHAIR: Would you like to make an opening statement in addition to your submission?

Ms WINTER: I will briefly paint a picture of the situation of people from a non English-speaking background [NESB] with disability based on my submission; it might be useful to do that. I will give a brief introduction about the organisation that I work for, the Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association [MDAA]. We provide individual and systemic advocacy service to people from all NESB backgrounds with all types of disability. In the last financial year we did so to about 160 people in New South Wales from about 30 different backgrounds with all sorts of disabilities. We represent, on a systemic level and lobby for, the interests of people from NESB with disability. We fund training and education campaigns and generally try to raise awareness.

We are funded by the Commonwealth under the Department of Health—it has now changed to the Department of Family Community Services and the Aged. To give a brief idea about the statistics because that often comes up, we estimate that about 4 per cent of the population in New South Wales are people from NESB with a disability. To break that down in other figures, 17 per cent of all people from NESB have a disability, or whatever figure you use is fair for that percentage of all the population of people with disabilities. I will talk about the five concerns we have raised. The major concerns for the group are: the lack of service provision in, something we call, the sort of whole of government ping-pong between different agencies; the lack of access to information, financial vulnerability and its use for carers and families which result from that.

I will paint a quick picture and then talk about the terms of reference of the inquiry. We estimate that about three out of four people from NESB with disability miss out simply because of their ethnicity which is a pretty shocking figure. Recently we received some more recent data from the Ageing and Disability Department which suggests that the Department of Community Services does much better but with an increased tendency to tender out services. Unless something is done it is going to get worse. We estimated that instead of every fourth or fifth person being from NESB only about 4 per cent to 5 per cent are accessing disability services. That is a huge gap that has not been addressed. The figures are varying: the data collected is very poor. We find with the recent data that with the Department of Community Services which services people with intellectual disabilities, it is about 13 per cent and in respite care services, non-Government funded, it goes down to 0.5 per cent or anywhere between that figure but it is certainly not reflective of the community. That is on top of what disability services talk about in relation to unmet need.

We then find that there seems to be a whole of government approach to disability and to ethnicity. With people from NESB with disability being told, "No, you don't fit in here because you are from NESB" or "You don't fit in here because you have a disability". That leads to people not being able to go anywhere which then results in huge burdens on the family and family breakdowns.. We found that people utilise these services at a much higher crisis point. It is at the point where people say, "I'm about to give up my child, I do not know what to do" or "We are going to put this person in a nursing home. We do not know what to do." So it is a much higher crisis point. There is virtually no information for people from NESB with disability. Recently we did some work in the community and a woman who has been living here for 15-20 years had no idea about the basic community services—home care, disability support, pension or transport support.. People do not know about it and there are

no initiatives from government to say what is available or what you can get in relation to support services.

In addition, people are quite financially vulnerable but we find that on top of all the disadvantages, people who come here with the disability have to wait for 10 years, not just two years, to get any sort of services. Migrants have to wait two years and people with disabilities who are migrants have to wait 10 years before they can access any sorts of services. Although there is a Commonwealth law, the State actually foots the bill because 10 years down the track people come with much higher support needs to the services and need services now when they could have had early intervention services or whatever. That is a huge concern. All the burden at the moment falls on the families. There is that myth of extended family support which in many communities does not exist. It is largely women who bear the burden and they are ageing very fast and getting disabilities along the way. That is the bleak picture that I have got to paint. I am happy to talk a bit more about the terms of the inquiry and what that means for people with disabilities from NESB or I am happy to answer questions.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Did you say it is 10 years before migrant children with disabilities can access government departments?

Ms WINTER: Yes, basically if you have a disability you cannot migrate into this country.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: There are caveats on that?

Ms WINTER: The Minister occasionally allows people under special consideration and also people to come in under family reunions. As you know migrants cannot access any government service the two years but for people with disabilities it is 10 years.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Your recommendation on page 18 states, "We recommend that the current bill be withdrawn."

Ms WINTER: We are saying that we would like a bill that makes an impact.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Have you read the Ethnic Affairs Commission Act?

Ms WINTER: Yes, in part, and what we know about it and the part we use.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Is it the same, worse or inappropriate?

Ms WINTER: I cannot say that it will make an impact. It is very difficult for us to say the bill has not made any impact because I cannot say that we have got these bad figures now because the bill makes no difference. Maybe the bill as it was made a major difference and that is why the figures are not worse. I do not think anyone can comment on that. Having read the bill now, I cannot see how it will make a positive impact on the situation. That is why we would like an inquiry into the needs of the community and use the white paper as the guideline that the Government put out in 1996. We should look at that paper and think about how can these things that have been identified by the community be addressed in the bill? How can the bill fit around the needs that are expressed in the community?

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Are you saying there is a lot about the bill which is theoretical and not practical, in particular, to the needs of NESB people?

Ms WINTER: I am concerned about the ethnic affairs priorities statements. I cannot find them anywhere in the new bill. They are the only thing where I can hang on some hope that they might have made a bit of a difference by some government service taking them into account. They are not strong or accountable enough and they are not tied to any real outcomes for people. They only work

for government departments as opposed to funded services and with an increasing in tendering out services to the non-government sector and the private sector, I cannot see how the community relations bill will make a difference.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Do you say it has no power?

Ms WINTER: It does not matter almost on that level. It has no relevance.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: It has a substance?

Ms WINTER: Yes, and I find it difficult to see what the relevance is in the context of the reality of what I am painting.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: If we add the needs of promotion of multiculturalism, access to equity, social justice issues and others, et cetera, would that be more acceptable to you?

Ms WINTER: In my submission I have talked about some ways of tying the things together so they actually has some outcomes on the ground, for example, if you have those objectives of the bill why do we not then use those objectives and principles to build around some outcomes and some performance indicators, some measurable ways of saying it makes a difference to people? Why do it if it does not make a difference and that is where we are coming from. We see people not being affected by the bill and, in fact, multiculturalism as an idea of being used as they ping-pong between governments. Today I have a letter the chair of the Ethnic Affairs Commission that says it is an issue for main street services so "people from NESB do not really fall into my portfolio".

Document tabled on motion by the Hon. Dr P. Wong, seconded by the Hon. J. M. Samios.

Ms WINTER: We invited the chair to participate in a launch—I am paraphrasing it. He says that he does not have any expertise and it is through mainstream service provision that the needs of people with a disability in a multicultural society are met. Opportunities for funders and service providers to become aware of their responsibilities for people from NESB, through workshops such as the one planned, can be useful in improving service provision. We invited the chair to participate in that to show some commitment and to be there. Very clearly he says that they do not have expertise in fact and they do not have the level of expertise that is required.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: I will be the devil's advocate. The Community Relations Commission and Principles of Multiculturalism Bill embraces all and therefore enlarges the power of the authority to influence the commission and may be in the future the Community Relations Commission will encompass what you are complaining about?

Ms WINTER: My problem is that at the moment it says it is multicultural ethnic affairs, and people from NESB fallout. If you call it the community relations bill, what community are we talking about? People with NESB with disabilities do not participate in the community, they miss out. What community are we talking about? I cannot see it. I know what you are trying to say. As an ideal world it would be fantastic if we could talk about the community.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: I am saying what the bill is implying on my view.

Ms WINTER: I cannot read it in the bill. I fail to read that this will make a difference because we talk about the community and all of a sudden the people that we are concerned about will fall under it.

CHAIR: An earlier witness argued that "community" would include disabled people as a community, not necessarily living together but they constitute a section of the community and will have access to this commission even if they were not from an ethnic background—and they should have access?

Ms WINTER: I have heard that argument in the disability community. It is a valuable argument and another way to utilise government and government resources to further issue. I am asking why would a commission be a commission for all of the community with all the government bodies, which are supposed to have some relationship with their communities and the services they fund, when there is such inequity as at the moment. Surely government's role is to look at current inequities in the community and address them somehow rather than saying, "This is for all of the communities." Yes, there are lots disadvantaged communities but there are lots of different bodies addressing those. Why is it that the only body aiming to address ethnic affairs all of a sudden becomes a broader community relations body?

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Is it true, as the previous witness said, that one problem is that the bill is not focused enough on ethnic communities?

Ms WINTER: It is not just not focused. The first reaction we get from "Community Relations" is that we are all part of the community so it is our commission whoever "us" is. It does not do much. The objectives and principles are built around multiculturalism, so it should be around the community, which is identified as being multicultural. I do not want to get into an argument as to whether it is NESB, ethnic or multicultural. I do not care. My concern is what does one do with the disadvantaged? If you blow up a commission to something that encompasses everybody, how will that deal with disadvantage. There are a lot of ideas about community that are not there.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: I assume that the Community Relations Commission by-line "for multicultural New South Wales" also really means nothing?

Ms WINTER: It does not mean much in terms of what is written there, yes. I want to go back to YIPS because I am concerned about those. I am sure you have heard this from other people that the only mechanism I have as a community person is to go to government bodies such as the Department of Community Services or the Ageing and Disability Department and say, "You have got some obligation as a government department under the Ethnic Affairs Commission Bill. What are you doing about that and what is the outcome", and making that government body accountable to the community that it is supposed to service. Once that is gone I do not know what else is left.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: It could well be called the community relations priority statement.

Ms WINTER: Taking what your colleague said, this could be a priority statement for people with disabilities?

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Is that not an improvement?

Ms WINTER: That is what I fail to understand. If it is a community relations bill, the priority statement could be about any group in the community, could it not?

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: Yes. I am asking the question.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: That is correct.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: It is correct.

Ms WINTER: So it could be anyone from single mothers to people with disabilities to the North Shore safety foreshore for us group? The priority statement could be used like that.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Do you see that you could access the Ethnic Affairs Commission under its new title—

Ms WINTER: Yes, but the competition will be much tighter.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: —for disability needs not ethnic needs?

Ms WINTER: It is hard to separate for us.

CHAIR: If you were to write the same letter next week following the passage of the bill would you receive a different reply or the same reply as the one you received from the Ethnic Affairs Commission?

Ms WINTER: I am not sure.

CHAIR: We also are not sure. Perhaps when the commission is eventually formed the commissioners will have to sit down and discuss your letter and formulate some policy, because the policy is not spelt out.

Ms WINTER: At the moment there is a policy that says that all government departments and commissions need to have a disability access plan. Certainly under that the Ethnic Affairs Commission would have some responsibility in terms of people with disabilities.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: But not resources?

Ms WINTER: I do not know. The competition for this sort of stuff will be much harder. I am not getting a foot in the door now and we are representing 20 per cent of the population of the target group of the EAC now. How will we get a foot in the door if we are only representing 3 per cent or 4 percent of the total population?

CHAIR: That is a problem with other legislation as well because bills often deal with principles and objectives, which are spelt out either by commissioner's or by regulation that may make it clearer. Perhaps those things should be made clear now rather than later. The practical stuff is not in the bill.

Ms WINTER: Certainly it has no impact as we see it at the moment. It is an opportunity missed. The EAC could do really good things in raising the NESB profile of the disability community for other government departments and could certainly look at ways of raising the concerns that 20 per cent of people with disabilities have, but that is not what is happening. There is already so much pressure on the EAC that nothing is happening.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Is it a fair comment that the name "community relations" in your mind is so wide that it could embrace virtually the activities of the great number of ministries and departments?

Ms WINTER: It certainly is wide enough and is based on the assumption that there is a community. We are arguing that people from NESB with disabilities are not part of that community, as it is now.

The Hon. Dr P. WONG: By enlarging its role as proposed by the bill, the EAC will really have lost its plot totally?

Ms WINTER: If the YIPS get lost and if this is not an opportunity to strengthen YIPS but to curtail them, yes, we would be very disappointed. We would also be very disappointed if the grants function was taken away, although we have never been successful in receiving a grant because we are not high on the priority, but that helps a lot of small communities to do work. If that is gone, I do not know what YIPS will do other than employ a few more people from NESB and government services, but by and large that does not apply to the people we are concerned about.

CHAIR: It seems from previous witnesses that YIPS have been strengthened in this bill—or that is the theory— and that they have added more departments.

Ms WINTER: I cannot read it like that. I read it through a couple of times but I cannot see how it is stronger. Our main concern is that if YIPS does not evolve through into government funded services and tendered out services, it will not make a difference to people from non-English-speaking backgrounds with disabilities.

(The witness withdrew)

FRANCESCA MERENDA, Retiree, 2/73 New Beach Road, Darling Point, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: In what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Dame FRANCESCA MERENDA: As a private citizen because I still love my fellow man and I would like to help them. I was brought up in a family that helped people and I am still doing it, even though I am 75 years young.

CHAIR: Did you receive a summons asking you to appear here today?

Dame FRANCESCA MERENDA: Yes, I have just received it all now.

CHAIR: Have you had a chance to look through the terms of reference of the inquiry?

Dame FRANCESCA MERENDA: Very briefly, without too much concentration on them.

CHAIR: The Committee is mainly looking at the impact of this bill and investigating what people think about the bill. Would you outline your experience in the ethnic community affairs area?

Dame FRANCESCA MERENDA: My work experience was with the Department of Immigration. I started there in 1969 as the very first ever Italian speaking welfare worker to help the Italian community to integrate and to help the wider community to understand the Italian community as well. It gave me the opportunity of putting forward my ideas because the department was very happy for me to make my own programs and do that sort of thing. The greatest thing that ever came out of that to me was group dealing with programs and services to migrants of which I was appointed a member with Frank Galbally, Nick Politis and Carlo Strinsky, commonly known as the Galbally report. The principles set down there are still just as valid today as they were in the 1970s. I did a whole lot of other things too and I had a lot of fun on the way.

CHAIR: You said to me earlier that you were perhaps the only person we have had as a witness who was interned during the war because of your Italian background.

Dame FRANCESCA MERENDA: Yes, I was interned in October 1942 and spent 16 months in an internment camp as a guest of the Australian Government. I can talk about it now but I could not in my early days and despite that I was then made a public servant in 1969.

CHAIR: That shows how much they trusted you.

Dame FRANCESCA MERENDA: I have a bit of history with the Sicily Relief Fund. I do not know if you heard of the earthquake in Sicily in 1968 which destroyed the western half of Sicily, but Popple Air Metal Stamping Co. had a factory at Marrickville and employed about 500 or 600 people. Tom Giuffre, a wonderful person, and I formed the Sicily Relief Fund, with Tom being the President. I was not working at the time and this was all voluntary. I was the secretary. I had a lot of time to run around, and I went to all the woollen mills, and I cajoled, stole, and conned them into letting me pay a little tiny bit of money for all their woollen things, because the earthquake was in January and it was very cold over there. A little sidelight to that was that Alitalia transported all the stuff that we sent over. We sent over medicines, woollen goods, and that sort of thing—but we also sent pasta over to Italy, a gift of Nanda! That is how the immigration department met me, through the Sicily relief fund and the Sicilians who were then sponsored by the Australian Government and brought to Australia as migrants. Then came my being employed by them.

CHAIR: One of the roles of the current Ethnic Affairs Commission is to provide interpreters. Would you be very concerned if that were not continued?

Dame FRANCESCA MERENDA: For many years we were at the mercy of people who came from Egypt and had a smattering of different languages but they did not have a strong knowledge of the language or ever studied the language; it was sort of marketplace language. That concerned us, and I was very adamant that we had to have standards. I should not tell stories out of school. One day the department sent me down a thing to have a look at. They had a caravan that used to go into the country to try to get people to become Australians. They had a big sign made, in the worst Italian that you ever saw. I said, "You can't send that out. It is ridiculous. Why didn't you show it to me before it went to print?" I was not an interpreter, but somebody decided to send it down to me. I was so furious, I got a copy of it, I went out to the airport the next morning, which was a Saturday, and sent it to the Minister for Immigration at his home and told him that he was not to send it out because using poor Italian made the department look bad. That really got my hair in a knot.

When I was a young girl a Judge Hidden—not the one who is on the bench now, but his father—told me how important it was to translate correctly. When he was on the country circuit the word "colpo" was translated as "a shot". Because the judge could speak Italian—he was very good at it, colpo" was "a blow". He said that that meant the difference between that person going free and going to gaol for life. A blow is different to a shot. So he said to the fellow who was interpreting, "Out of my court. Never come into my courtroom again on my circuit." He would not have him at all as an interpreter. He instilled in me importance of correctly translating the word for what it was.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: The Good Neighbour Council played a key role in dealing with migrants in those days.

Dame FRANCESCA MERENDA: With English migrants.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: But they tried to reach out?

Dame FRANCESCA MERENDA: That came later, yes.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: You would have had an involvement?

Dame FRANCESCA MERENDA: I was involved, yes.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: And you would have attended the Australian citizenship conventions in Canberra?

Dame FRANCESCA MERENDA: No, I never went to one in Canberra. I could not afford it; we were poor.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: From your perception, how important is the Ethnic Affairs Commission to the community?

Dame FRANCESCA MERENDA: The one that is there now?

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Yes.

Dame FRANCESCA MERENDA: I thought that when it was established it was an absolutely wonderful idea. One of the roles of the Ethnic Affairs Commission was to condition the

general public as to what we really are. We are a multicultural society; we have people from all different countries in the world. We need to understand this, and we need to make allowances for it. We need to accept that because you happen to be Greek, I happen to be Italian, and you happen to be Chinese, it does not matter; that is not important. The most important thing is that we live together, understand each other, and respect each other.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: You are saying that we are all Australians but we have a different ethnicity, being Italian in background, or Chinese, et cetera? But we are all Australians?

Dame FRANCESCA MERENDA: Yes. But even if you had a group of Australians who were all of the same ethnic background—say, Scottish, Irish or whatever—in that group people are different to each other. They have different characters; they have different ways of thinking about things. We have to understand that, respect each other, and accept each other.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: We also have an Australian ethnicity as well as a nationality.

Dame FRANCESCA MERENDA: Of course. That is the ultimate: Australian.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: That would evolve with multiculturalism?

Dame FRANCESCA MERENDA: And with a few generations. I can remember a friend of mine telling me that when he was a little boy going to school he would not take salami or mortadella sandwiches. He made his mother give him Vegemite and cheese sandwiches.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: How important is the name "Ethnic Affairs" to the commission at the moment?

Dame FRANCESCA MERENDA: As important as the media will allow us to have it. They talk about ethnics in a disparaging way. They tend to say that an ethnic is a person of non-English speaking background. That is all baloney. We have to get back to our English language and use the words in the correct phrase. I can remember reading many years ago that a judge gave a judgment about the word "bastard". He said that the word "bastard" had very many different meanings. It can go from an offensive term, a derogatory term, to a term of endearment. So you have to see who says it, how it is said, and the conditions on which it is said. But it is the same word.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: What about the word "multicultural"? Would you be happy to see the Ethnic Affairs Commission change its name to "Commission for Multiculturalism"?

Dame FRANCESCA MERENDA: Why are we wasting time on little things like that? They are not important. If it is multicultural, okay, let us call it multicultural. We are a multicultural society; there is no question about that. Is there any other word that is better suited? I cannot think of one.

CHAIR: To refresh your memory, the bill that the Premier has introduced says that English is a common language.

Dame FRANCESCA MERENDA: But English as it should be spoken.

CHAIR: Are you happy with that wording?

Dame FRANCESCA MERENDA: I take exception to the Australian *Macquarie Dictionary* promoting this thing about ethnicity being of non-English speaking background. I object to that. I am a stickler for language.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Do you agree that the name "Community Relations Commission" in place of the existing name, "Ethnic Affairs Commission", is misleading?

Dame FRANCESCA MERENDA: I have no hassles about either name. To me it does not really matter. It is the work that the commission is doing and how it is doing it that is important.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Do people in the frontline of ethnic affairs relate as well to "Community Relations Commission" as they do to "Ethnic Affairs Commission" or "Multicultural Relations Commission"? A host of people have put to the Committee the argument that for a lot of people newly arrived, as it were, who had a need of services from the Ethnic Affairs Commission would find it much easier relating to either the Ethnic Affairs Commission or the Multicultural Relations Commission, or words to that affect, because the name "Community Relations Commission" implies that it does not focus so much on ethnic affairs or multicultural affairs. Do you agree with that?

Dame FRANCESCA MERENDA: Is "ethnic affairs" being used in the context of non-English speaking people?

CHAIR: To clarify the situation, the Government proposes to change the name of the Ethnic Affairs Commission to the Community Relations Commission.

Dame FRANCESCA MERENDA: I have no thoughts on the matter. I have not thought that one out at all.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: Dame Francesca Meranda has already answered the same question twice. No amount of turning around could get her to change her evidence. She said that it does not matter what the name is, that the important thing is the work the commission is doing. I think we must respect her answer.

The Hon. Dr. P. WONG: I agree.

CHAIR: Yes. I simply explained why the question was asked.

Dame FRANCESCA MERENDA: As I said, I am a little unprepared.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: I would like to congratulate Dame Francesca Meranda on the great work she has done over the last half century at least.

Dame FRANCESCA MERENDA: Even longer. When I was a little girl in north Queensland I was the only child in a little town called Tully who had gone to high school. We started to get coupons during the war; we had to fill out forms and things. None of the poor Italian farmers up there could speak English or fill out a form, so they would come to my father, and he would ask me to fill the form out. I would fill the form out for them, and then go up to the Clerk of Petty Sessions at the police station and be their interpreter—not that I was an interpreter, but I could speak the two languages. I think that was the reason that I became a little obvious in the little tiny town—the only girl in that whole area of Italian background who had gone to high school.

CHAIR: How old were you then?

Dame FRANCESCA MERENDA: I was born in 1924. I went to high school in 1937. The only reason I was able to go to high school was that I had won a bursary. The nuns of Charters Towers took the full amount of the bursary for my boarding fees. Then I won another bursary, and I finished the other two years. I finish school in 1940.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: Do you remember the Fongs at a grocery shop in Charters Towers?

Dame FRANCESCA MERENDA: No. We were good little girls; we were not allowed to go out. The only time we went out was to go to the cathedral for a big mass or something like that. But I remember the Mullikeeps in Charters Towers. Those big, white Mullikeeps were the leftovers from the mining that happened there. And then, of course, later on I finished up in an internment camp for 16 months. Then I finished up being employed by the Department of Immigration. My father was the president of the San Francesco Catholic Italian Association. He came to Sydney in 1944, when he became the president. In 1950 he formed the Italo-Australian Welfare Centre, which was to help the migrants to come out here. So I was born into a family who did those sorts of things. At San Francesco we built the first kindergarten ever. It was built by a non-English speaking group in Leichhardt. It is still there in Styles Street, Leichhardt. I was involved very heavily involved with that, raising money, running it afterwards, and all that sort of thing. We did a few good things.

I have very happy memories of what was done in the past. It was difficult in those days. You know the story of Judge Lamaro. In the 1930s he was Attorney General of New South Wales. He could not speak a word of Italian. He got himself through university, became a barrister and teamed up with Abe Landa. They had a business. I have a friend who swears down my throat that he had to be Jewish, and I said not on your life, his family came from the same arm as my parents. He was then made a judge, but he could not speak a word of Italian. That is how bad things were here. Things were really bad, they could not stand the Italians. One could not speak a word in a foreign language anywhere, they would say to you, "Go back to your own country."

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: Now they love them.

Dame FRANCESCA MERENDA: Yes, but you have an added problem.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: I am going to Sicily in July.

Dame FRANCESCA MERENDA: Don't touch Sicily on me. You have an added problem, because your people came out in the 1830s for the gold rush. We have young people here who are fifth and sixth generation Australians but because their features are so obvious people still think of them as foreigners, but they are not. You are more Australian than we are, who have only been here for one or two generations. So, you have a terrible problem there.

CHAIR: Thank you for coming today and giving us your views.

Dame FRANCESCA MERENDA: I am sorry I was not prepared as well as I should be.

CHAIR: If you have any more thoughts we would be very happy to hear from you. We appreciate and respect your contribution to our society.

The Hon. J. M. SAMIOS: Perhaps we should note that Dame Francesca Meranda expected to be called on the 22nd. At the last moment there was a vacancy in the witness list today and she did not have time to prepare.

Dame FRANCESCA MERENDA: I will keep in touch and I will go through this with a fine tooth comb. I feel that today I have just talked about me and not the real issues. I would like to do something properly.

(The witness withdrew) (The Committee adjourned at 4.47 p.m.)