

Viva ECC – A National Perspective

Harbaum, Carl “Viva ECC - A National Perspective” Infocus (Ethnic Communities' Council of NSW) 18(4), 1995, P 14.

20 Years of the ECC of NSW - Special Edition of Infocus, July/August 1995

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Just how effective are our multicultural policies in obtaining real access and equity for people from non-English speaking backgrounds?

Honorary FECCA President and former ECC of NSW chairperson takes up the issue.

The inaugural meeting of the ECC was most remarkable in that on the formation of a State based organisation of what was then called new Australians, amongst the distinguished guests were the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. The ECC already practised equality on its first agenda when there were three women amongst the six member organising committee.

At our 10th anniversary the then Premier Neville Wran stated: "Ten years ago I remember predicting that the formation of the ECC had the potential to be one of the greatest and most invaluable services ever contributed by any section of the Australian community to Australia. Who could have predicted how right I would be?"

Since inauguration we now have amongst others: multicultural television, the Ethnic Affairs Commission, Anti-Discrimination Board, Equal Opportunity Tribunal, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) and a National Agenda for Multicultural Australia. As much as we appreciate their establishment, our anniversary should encourage us to question

whether these institutions have served us well. Perhaps some of these institutions should be judged by the same criteria that are applied to the ECC and FECCA.

We might ask ourselves how we can assist the Ethnic Affairs Commission and OMA in ensuring the implementation of all government policies. Where is their influence if amongst others, the boards of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Australian Broadcasting Authority, or the higher echelons of the public service are either void or lack appropriate participation of people of non-English speaking origin?

The United States of America without a national agenda, without an Ethnic Affairs Commission or OMA has seen the appointment this century of three first generation migrants to the high court, whilst we have hardly any judges of non-English speaking origin in the lower courts.

How is it possible that one of the symbols of multiculturalism, SBS TV, from its formation to today has given us a multitude of excellent programs and *Dateline* investigates international affairs, but there is not one regular quality feature in support of ethnic affairs and multiculturalism. Perhaps we should turn to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation for such need.

The ECC of NSW has at all times given true leadership and it was appropriate therefore that it initiated a meeting on 8th July 1979 leading to the formation of our Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia.

In the future as in the past our hopes and ideas will be challenged, but their undoubted value to the community at large will ensure further progress.

The efforts of the ECC have ensured that all Australians can live together in peace and harmony to implement the hopes of our national anthem "with courage let us all combine to advance Australia fair".