

Misunderstanding, misinformation shroud report: author

“Misunderstanding, Misinformation Shroud Report: Author” Migration (Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs) No. 73, 1988, p 7.

The CAAIP Report:

The release of the report has the ethnic communities of Australia up in arms, but one of the authors, Tony Bonnici, believes it has been shrouded in misunderstanding and misinformation.

Former chairman of the Victorian Ethnic Communities Council (VECC) and one of the authors of the CAAIP report, Tony Bonnici has called for an enlightened consideration of the report.

Mr Bonnici who still is senior deputy chairman of the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils (FECCA), resigned from his Victorian post because his personal support for the report conflicted with the VECC's response to it.

Mr Bonnici said there had been a lot of misunderstanding about, and some deliberate misrepresentation of, the report.

Ethnic groups involved in a power play had created a negative atmosphere which was tending to overshadow the purpose and the most important recommendations of the report, he said.

"The purpose of the report was to have a look at Australia's economic position, to look at Australia's immigration policies, and to advise the government as to the best way of selecting migrants. But people have misunderstood its purpose.

"Take, for example, the question of multiculturalism that has been storming about.

The committee certainly did not have as one of its terms of reference anything to do with multiculturalism, but going around Australia people linked multiculturalism with immigration so the committee decided in its wisdom to report back to the minister the perceptions which existed. And that is all it did but that was interpreted by some sections of the ethnic media in particular as the committee's downgrading of multiculturalism."

Mr Bonnici said he was disappointed with much of the discussion to date.

"Unfortunately, it has focussed on matters which were not the centre of the report. The central issue, as far as immigration is concerned, is 'Who is immigration for?' It is in fact an issue which affects all Australians not just one section of the community, so one has to start from that point and ask 'What are the needs that it is supposed to service for all Australians?'

"Then you follow through with the three particular needs. The first is family reunion - very much a part of the Australian ethos. Secondly, there are the legal and moral obligations which Australia has with reference to refugees. And thirdly, you have got the economic needs of the nation bringing in people who are going to fit into the work force and who are going to be productive.

"It is a question of balances, of balancing the needs of family reunion with the refugee program and with the other part of the program which is, of course, employment."

Mr Bonnici said FECCA and the ethnic communities had failed to look at the report and the immigration issues involved from the wider national perspective.

"(FECCA) has overreacted. It has been too

partisan in its approach because its basic line has, and always has been, family reunion and refugees," he said.

Mr Bonnici said misrepresentation and misunderstanding of the report had clouded not only perception of its purpose, but also the main recommendations of the report.

"One of the main issues of the report is the legislation, which has not rated a mention anywhere. The legislation is very important. The present act which the department operates under has to be overhauled completely and absolutely. It is far too general and negative in its approach.

"The key changes proposed in the report are to spell out what the rights of entry are, what the rights of refusal of entry are, the granting of permits, the refusal of permits, what the powers of the ministers are, the challenging of those powers through the court system - this is all set out in the model attached to the report."

Mr Bonnici said he had no doubt about the long-term value of the report.

"I support the report without reservation. It is quite perceptive. It looks at the needs of the nation. It is about time that the national needs in immigration were looked at. It is about time, in fact, that all the immigration policies, that the whole of immigration, was brought into the mainstream of Australian life."