T R A N S C R I P T

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Anti-Vilification Protections

Melbourne—Tuesday, 25 February 2020

MEMBERS

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Mr James Newbury—Deputy Chair
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WITNESSES

Mr Eddie Micallef, Chairperson, and

Mr Chris Christoforou, Executive Officer, Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria.

The CHAIR: I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting today. I pay my respects to their elders, both past and present, and the Aboriginal elders of other communities that are here today. All mobile phones should be turned to silent at this point. I welcome Eddie Micallef, the Chairperson of the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria, and Chris Christoforou, the Executive Officer of the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria.

All evidence taken by this Committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. Therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here today, but if you go outside and repeat the same things, including on social media, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard and is also being broadcast live on Parliament's website. Please note that footage can only be rebroadcast in accordance with the conditions set out in standing order 234. You will also be provided with a proof version of the transcript for you to check as soon as it is available. Verified transcripts, PowerPoint presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website as soon as possible. I now invite you to proceed with a brief, 5- to 10-minute opening statement to the committee, which will be followed up by questions. Thank you, Eddie.

Mr MICALLEF: First of all I am very pleased to be here to rekindle some of my old associations and to keep abreast of what is happening out there in the field. Just following on from the VMC—I thought their contribution was excellent, so we endorse that. The VMC see themselves as the voice of multiculturalism. We distinguish ourselves. We call ourselves, as the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria, the voices of multiculturalism because we represent 220 ethnospecific organisations and eight regions.

We overlap a fair bit, but we are a policy and advocacy body. So we are funded to an extent by government, but we are not beholden to government and we will make representations to governments from time to time. We may be in step with the government of the day, or we may be out of step, but that does not hold us back from saying what we believe needs to be said in these situations.

We have enormous challenges in relation to vilification and racism, and one of the issues that we have that we are confronting is the racism from the community towards sectors of the community—the broader community. Also some of that racism is not confined to what you can see, the extremist right-wing or racist elements; they are within some of the established communities as well, so that is a challenge that we have. We put that on the table because you cannot hide those sorts of things. You have got to confront them, you have got to talk about it and you have got to—from my background in occupational health—identify, you evaluate and then you move into systems or processes to alleviate those issues. That is the way I see it.

I must say the parliamentary committee system, I think, is a wonderful system, being part of the old dying with dignity and complementary nursing inquiries of the past, and community violence, and if you can come to some arrangement—I am not being patronising; I am preaching to you—if you can come out with a unified position it has a powerful position in Parliament, and they will take notice of a joint response. So I wish you all the best in that regard and also say: I appreciate the Parliament of the day taking up those issues in a very meaningful way and obviously being very serious about it.

Getting on, you have received our submission. I have read it. To me, it is a little bit too academic. From one of those people who has fought for plain English in legislation over the years, I think we have still got a little bit to do.

Discrimination and vilification in the religious area varies across the state, and it is still not guaranteed at the national level. The state of Victoria has a specific framework, and I think we are very appreciative of that. The *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act* addresses both racial and religious vilification, and I think that is important. The Act defines vilification as:

> … conduct that incites hatred against, serious contempt for, or revulsion or severe ridicule of, that other person or class of persons—

due to their race or religion. And I think that is vilification. I struggle sometimes to argue with people or talk to people about, 'What's the difference between vilification and racism?'. One is what I consider to be the incitement with certain areas. And I heard you talk about whether certain aspects should be in the *Crimes Act* or not, because vilification can get out of hand. In the New Zealand experience, I mean, vilification led to an act of terrorism that killed 100 people or so. I think that is important, so we have to keep that in mind.

Many other groups are victims of vilification—the LGBTIQ. And I do not think you can consider yourself to be an understanding person if you say, 'I'm not a racist, but I'm homophobic' or 'I'm misogynistic' or whatever. I think with that process in a person's mind you have to be conscious of the way you treat other people and to treat other people with respect. One of the things I say from my non-English-speaking background and growing up in this country is that I am over being tolerated. I want to be received for what I am, not tolerated for what I am, and I think the words 'tolerance' and 'tolerated' to me are not a good way of accepting people into our multicultural community. To me that is pretty important.

To me the issue of the Scanlon report and the support for multiculturalism does not tell the complete story. If you see the 75 per cent support for multiculturalism and you look at the anti-Muslim aspect of it, it is around 15 or 20 per cent, and I can see that that, to me, is a bit of a contradiction. I admire and I support the wonderful work that the Scanlon Foundation does, but I think we have got to read between the lines sometimes to see what it actually means. So I think that that is important.

We did a focus group, and I heard you asking, on the road with Muslim mothers some years ago. When you talked about, 'What are the support groups?', we got these stories from a whole range of Muslim mothers who talked about the way they were run off the road and the way they were spat at and discriminated against in a really angry way. They go home and they tell their children, Australians, and you can understand how some of these children grow up to be, how shall I say, disrespectful of Australian law and an Australian community that has allowed their parents to be discriminated against in such a way. So I think these are things that we have to take into account—that this sort of stuff goes on.

In relation to whether we need laws, I think laws need to cover everybody. Also, when you have a law, when you have regulations, when you have those sorts of aspects, it is about the understanding. The community has to understand all of these laws, has to know how to enact and where to go for support. You talked a lot about, 'Where do people go?'. I have been involved in the Springvale Community Health Centre, which I set up. We did a lot of work in that area back in the 1980s in Springvale. I think that is important. So there are various bodies that are able to respond. I mean, I have been on the board getting on 17 years in Springvale. I have been on the board of now Star Health, Inner South. They do a lot of work with the Indigenous communities there, and that helps to break down those barriers by creating an involvement with those communities. When those communities get that support, they are able to respond and articulate and say what they think and so on.

For those of us who spent 2 hours watching the *Australian Dream* on Sunday night, it rekindled a lot. Look, I grew up a child of migrants in Reservoir and I got discriminated against. Even in the Catholic school I was in I was treated as somewhat of a different person. I have later on done my interviews at Monash University—you can read that when I pass away—and I made some disparaging comments about my religious indoctrination and the way it was an impediment to me rather than a help to me in my early days and I went on to do other things despite it.

Look, I think it is important for people to be able to be aware of the issues. The racism that is given to certain sectors in the community, especially the Indigenous community, to an extent the Jewish community and African communities, I think is something that we really have to respond to. I think your role is to come up with a set of proposals that encourages, helps them to make a productive person within the community, to develop to their full extent and so on.

One of the things that we did not put in the submission is the rate of unemployment in certain sectors of the various communities—the Muslim community up in the northern suburbs. When you say youth unemployment is around 10 or 15 per cent, I mean in some of those communities it is around 60, 70 or even higher in sectors of those communities. They make themselves, I suppose, targets for the media, and the media has a lot to answer for. We have worked a lot with the media. We have worked a lot with the police to stop the stereotyping that has taken place over the years. They are now very sensitive to that. I have sat on the chief commissioner's human rights strategic committee. We interact with those communities—the work we are doing with the

Sudanese community, where you have had a number of youth suicides. With international students, again with the Indian community, with the Latin American community—youth suicides there. There is a whole lot of work that we need to do within those communities.

I had a lot of notes here, but I know I have got sidetracked. A lot of this comes from my heart and the way I feel. Sometimes with the academic stuff about any reform facing the *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act* 'should consider intersectionality as a framework', I think, 'What are you saying?'. It comes across to a number of individuals who may suffer from several layers of discrimination, and I put it in my own language. You see what I mean? Sometimes it is better to say it as you think it rather than to say it as an academic exercise in writing. So look, I will leave my opening comments at that, and ask Chris, our Executive Officer, to supplement.

Mr CHRISTOFOROU: Thank you. Thank you, Chair. I guess from the ECCV's perspective, and building on what Eddie has spoken about this morning, our view is that the test for vilification is way too high within the current legislation, and I think that is kind of evidenced by the fact that almost two decades after its introduction there have only been two successful prosecutions of vilification. I think the test for incitement is something that the parliamentary Inquiry and this Committee should consider in terms of broadening the definition so that vilifying behaviour has a better likelihood of being successfully prosecuted. I guess the view is that the idea of the difference between vilification and discrimination, racial discrimination, is something that is confusing. Certainly we had a community consultation in Footscray in late November last year where that was apparent from those who attended. There were about 30-odd people from the community and the feedback was—I guess they spoke about racism in general terms rather than vilification per se in terms of the idea of inciting a third party, an arbitrary third party or an abstract third party, to somehow take action, negative action, against a group of people. That certainly is something that should be clarified as part of an education program both within schools, as was previously asked about and answered by the VMC, but also more broadly within our community, so if there is a change in the legislation, that is something that is communicated broadly across the community so that people understand how they can go about protecting their own sense of safety, their dignity and that of their community within the Victorian legislative framework.

Building on what Eddie was talking about in terms of intersectionality, I think that that idea of vilification being targeted at racial and religious intolerance is obviously very, very, very important. But I think broadening the scope of that legislation to include other groups that do experience hatred as a result of sexual orientation or gender or disability is something that the parliamentary Inquiry should consider, because again I think the idea that people fit into nice neat boxes is not always the case. What is important to people in terms of their identity is something that should be covered by legislation so that people can feel safe within our community, and obviously the strength of Victoria as a socially cohesive state is something that is not sort of at risk of fragmenting.

The CHAIR: Thank you on behalf of the Committee for your submission and all the work that you both have done over many, many years and, Eddie, as a former Member as well.

Mr MICALLEF: Forty-six years we have been going.

The CHAIR: Fantastic.

Mr MICALLEF: We were there before SBS and we were there before FECCA (Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia), the federal body, so we set the pattern, and I think it set the groundwork for our multiculturalism. Each year we have what is called the Walter Lippmann oration, which acknowledges one of the founding fathers of the setting up of the Ethnic Communities' Council. Personally I worked with Walter Lippmann in setting up the VMC as the Ethnic Affairs Commission back in 1982, before I went into Parliament, so I have had a long history. But these sorts of things were initiated in Victoria, and I think they have set the pattern, the template, for the rest of Australia to respond to.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I know that Committee members will have questions, but I really wanted to just ask one question. Eddie, you spoke about unemployment, in particular among the youth in the north and the west, where my electorate is. We know, we have heard stories—I hear stories all the time—where there are challenges when someone of Muslim faith applies for a job. Whether it is the name, whether it is the hijab or

whether it is appearance, these are the issues that every day young Muslims are facing. In your view, how can we address those concerns under this umbrella?

Mr MICALLEF: Well, there are a number of companies that when you put in job applications—what do they call it when they take the names off? A number of companies have signed up to that process. But I think it really is the unions. Historically unions have not played a good role, and I come from the union movement. They need to lift their game. Employer organisations need to lift their game. When I was on the engineering skills committee as a board member and working with both unions and employers we went out to Collingwood when it was a TAFE. A bus driver pulled up with a group of schoolkids and said, 'Look, if you don't do well at school, this is where you'll finish up—in a factory around here' and those sorts of things. So they are not encouraged.

Certain communities encourage. The Karen people that work in Ballarat—I mean, you talked about the regional stuff. I went up there, and a lot of them are working for Cambridge chicken, I think it is, as chicken pluckers. The council had a forum with the local community, councillors—we went up as Ethnic Communities' Council reps—and the local employer organisations, and I got up and said, 'Look, it's important for your community to have a job, but I think you can't be a chicken plucker for the rest of your life. You've got to look at ways and means of enhancing the education of your youth to have bigger ideas and to go on to other things'.

You have got to encourage. And look, the country areas are different in this sense. Because of the difficulty in getting employees they have reached out to the various ethnic communities like the Albanians in Shepparton and before that, historically, the Italians up in the tobacco thing. Even my background, the Maltese background, had the cane cutters in Babinda. My father was a cane cutter in Innisfail and Babinda back in the 1930s. So wherever it has been difficult there has not been a problem, but whenever employment becomes a challenge and a difficulty you have got to be educated to a standard where you can get.

One of the things—I used to train apprentices in the industry, and I understand this—is the fact that people are encouraged to have an academic outcome rather than a trade or a traineeship background. I think it can be a lot. The government did a bit in opening up TAFE; I was on the board of William Angliss for 10 years as well, so I understand those sorts of issues, and I think we have got to be able to bring those people in to get them trained to a stage so they can take advantage of these situations. So look, I think it is a whole-of-community approach.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Eddie.

Mr TAK: Thank you, Eddie and Chris, for your presentation, but particularly to Eddie, being the former Member for Springvale. That is where I grew up.

Mr MICALLEF: Heang was my neighbour. He was a kid then.

Mr TAK: That is right—16, 17. That is right. But I just wanted to say especially the Springvale community centre is a tremendous job for positive change. You would remember quite well, in terms of the history, it is not necessarily to do with vilification or hate conduct or anything, but because of the history—it could be two or many ethnic groups. For example, Cambodians and the Vietnamese at school—there was always a bit of trouble. So my question is: what sort of support is available for individuals or groups that might have experienced vilification or hate conduct?

Mr MICALLEF: Look, there is a number of things. I think we did a lot in the community health centre, working with the Cambodians, with SICMAA, with the Cambodian association, with Youhorn Chea and those sort of people, and Beha, and we got the resources for them to work with those communities.

We went into schools. I used to work with the Springvale Drug Action Committee, because at the time the drug scene got out of hand in Springvale and we had quite a lot of deaths in the area and some of the schools handled it badly. A young Cambodian student was thrown out of one of the secondary schools there and two weeks later he was dead, rather than being supported. But I understand what you are talking about. The community health centres, the organisations themselves you have funded—the Cambodian association, and the Indochinese and the Vietnamese women's group—a lot of them do that. I chaired the Springvale Drug Action Committee for a number of years, and we worked with the police. I think the police are pretty important. Rather than arresting people—because a lot of people end up with criminal records for throwing away a cigarette or because they do not pay their fines, and they end up in the courts and get a criminal record. You had the situation in one of the

jails where you had a Vietnamese section within the jail, which is rather sad. I think it is important for the police to be aware of these issues.

The support from local government is important. It is underestimated the role that local government play too in bringing these groups together. There is a statue of Jenny Slade, who was the social worker for the old City of Springvale many years ago, because she did a lot of pioneering work in that way and set the program. The Springvale citizens advice bureau, those sorts of groups out in your area, do a lot of work.

You go into the schools, talk to them—the welfare people within the schools—and rather than sort of expelling people, bringing them in and supporting them. I think you have got to give them that sort of approach. I mean, I see a lot of work about the police in schools stuff. Some of those are good and some of them not so good. It just depends on where they are coming from.

But, look, it is a challenge, and I think government today has to pick those groups and organisations to support that are really effective and do an assessment and evaluation and go on from that. We have our state conference this year where those policies come up, and we are trying to bring young people into our organisation. We have an intercultural youth group. We are trying to get them to have a say within our organisation to make sure that we are not the old relics of the past preaching to the newcomers. So these are challenges we have all got, not only in government but in the community.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you both. You earlier described yourselves as the voices of multiculturalism, and I do want to say I found your submission quite profound and I thought that that absolutely shone through in the submission.

Mr MICALLEF: Good. Thank you.

Mr NEWBURY: Two things I wanted to touch on in that submission were, one, the under-reporting of racism. I think that is an area I would like to unpick. One of the causes you note is 'normalisation of abuse'. You mentioned earlier in your testimony the importance of identifying a problem before you can build the systems. So how can we as a state—and if you would not mind just unpicking it a little bit—better uncover and report racism?

Mr MICALLEF: Well, I think, first of all, a lot of people are abused, and they are abused so often they become immune to the fact that it is wrong, and they just accept it. I mean, I have even seen it on trains and trams where people are being abused. We have got to run a community campaign. Look, the same way with domestic violence, it is not right. Like, what about an advert saying when somebody is talking disparagingly about a partner, or someone is in a pub talking disparagingly about an African or a Jew or whatever person? I mean, let people know that these are unacceptable. I think people have to understand what is racism and its impact. I think Stan Grant talked very graciously about it: you do not know what racism is until you have been affected by it. People have got to be able to understand how to express and how to respond to this racism. We have got to bring that out and run a community campaign that it is not acceptable to vilify in a way, and this should be part of any legislation. It has to have an education arm. The regulatory arm you only bring into place when the education arm fails. That is the way I see it. Soft regulation in my background in occupational health only worked under the federal regulation, so I have an understanding. What was the second part of your—

Mr NEWBURY: How can we do better at reporting?

Mr MICALLEF: Well, with our 220 organisations we have newsletters, we have forums, we have policy committees and we have regional committees. We can do a lot in informing our communities what is the cause of racism, what is racism and how to respond to racism and vilification.

Mr NEWBURY: To touch on the second part of your submission that really struck me, it was the impact, and you just mentioned it then. Some of the things you noted, I think, are things that are worth putting into the record—loss of confidence, efforts to blend in, feeling scared, reduced contribution to society, and the list goes on and on. One of the recommendations you made to address that is prosecutions that recognise multiple layers of discrimination. How would that look?

Mr MICALLEF: What—in legislation?

Mr NEWBURY: Yes.

Mr MICALLEF: If it is just a general clause of vilification, I think Fiona Patten covers that in her proposal. There are multiple layers. You have got to say vilification is banned. Anything that encourages or teaches people to disrespect and to respond in a negative way to people or things—organisations, cultures, religions, races—is bad. Stan Grant told the story about being in his bath trying to rub the black out of his skin to become normal. I did a little bit of that. They used to call me a wog in primary school. I was one of the first group in the 1950s in a primary school. I was swamped later on by a lot of Italian, Dutch and other European migrants, but I was one of the first. I tried to fit in. It is a natural trait to try and be what your contemporaries are.

When I first went to America back in the early 1980s I saw all these foreign names and people were just treated normally, with different names. But if you had a different name or you ate a cheese that smelled a bit—and I have seen it in the workplace I was in. They told the European guy, the German guy, with the gorgonzola cheese to go outside and eat it—'Don't bring that smelly stuff in here'. But now it is wonderful to be able to eat all the international cuisines that we have in Victoria. So those are the sorts of responses we need to have.

Ms COUZENS: Thank you both for coming along today and sharing your experiences from your community. I am interested to know whether you see a difference between the metropolitan community and regional and rural communities.

Mr MICALLEF: Well, I do. The metropolitan area varies enormously, and the regional area varies enormously. We are doing great work in Mildura. We are doing great work in Shepparton, Bendigo, Ballarat—and the anti-mosque stuff up in Bendigo got out of hand. I went up there with the police and inspected it. The police in some areas are doing excellent work, and the community. You get a councillor who belongs to some organisation and throws up all the unrest and the racism and does so in a way that it is on the verge, whether it is vilification or whether it is just a view, freedom of speech—you know, it is a fine line between both of them sometimes. You have got to be careful of that.

But look, wherever you get a group within the community doing good work, they can overcome or respond to that. We were talking about that community up with the swastikas—

Mr SOUTHWICK: Yes, Beulah.

Mr MICALLEF: They responded to it. I think that is the way to respond to it. Where you do not have a community that is active and able to respond to that, that is where the negative forces get the upper hand. So it is not even; it is not across the board.

Ms COUZENS: Do you think that community leaders play a significant role in driving this stuff?

Mr MICALLEF: Yes, very much so, either way—

Ms COUZENS: Yes.

Mr MICALLEF: And it is up to the Facebook stuff and so on that it is out of hand. Look, it is a different world. I was even called a wog in the Victorian Parliament, and an Afghan and so on. I mean, we have moved on from that, which is good.

Ms COUZENS: And what do you think needs to be done to address that online vilification? That is something that we know is happening out there.

Mr MICALLEF: Something has to be done about it, the vilification. I am not an expert in that area, but I know it has to be taken on, I suppose, internationally. It is bigger than a state issue; it is a national and international issue, and it has to be responded to.

Ms COUZENS: I think maybe having those things taken down immediately rather than being left to spread around the world might be a good thing.

Mr MICALLEF: Well, with the New Zealand stuff, which was online for, what, 17 minutes or so, it just encourages—

Ms COUZENS: Yes. So what is your view around the effectiveness of the current legislation?

Mr MICALLEF: Well, it is not used enough, obviously. If it is not used, it is not working.

Ms COUZENS: But what improvements do you think could be made to that?

Mr MICALLEF: Well, it needs to be broadened, for a start, and it needs to be promoted.

Ms COUZENS: And whose role is it to promote it? Is it everybody's or organisations like yours?

Mr MICALLEF: Well, the government must have a prime role. The government must take the primary, and then with VMC grants and so on, with anything we are doing with our anti-racism stuff—Chris, do you want to talk a bit about our anti-racism strategy?

Mr CHRISTOFOROU: We are currently funded by the State Government to run an anti-racism community engagement campaign, and really our focus is on systemic racism. So going back to a lot of the questions that the Committee here has asked around why people are experiencing entrenched unemployment in some communities, it is addressing the systemic factors of why people are under-reporting their experiences of vilification or why they are not accessing our health services, for example. I think they are the sorts of things that we are working with at a strategic level with a number of organisations that are looking at taking measures to address the experiences of different groups within our community. Going back to your question about how to change things, I think it is about probably removing the onus from the individual—so going back to that idea of why people are not actually engaging in the reporting process. It is because the onus is on them, and if they are not feeling safe to navigate the legal system or do not have confidence in our justice system, then I think that that is a significant issue. So potentially having the ability of some organisations that are advocates, such as the Anti-Defamation League, to actually take action on behalf of communities—I think that could be a way possibly of having more engagement in the legislation.

Ms COUZENS: Would you see community organisations taking on those roles?

Mr CHRISTOFOROU: I think there would be a whole range of organisations that would be encouraged to engage in reforming legislation.

Mr MICALLEF: Chris, can you talk about what you were going to in Bendigo with the anti-racism stuff up there on Wednesday?

Mr CHRISTOFOROU: Yes, they are running some anti-racism training in schools in a whole range of education settings. But again, I have done some regional visits recently, and Shepparton is at a point where they are opening their fifth mosque, and four years down the track Bendigo cannot get their first mosque off the ground. So I think some communities are doing it a lot better than others, and I think, yes, there is a lot of work that needs to happen.

Mr MICALLEF: That was a significant grant we got for the anti-racism strategy, wasn't it? How much was it?

Mr CHRISTOFOROU: It was $150 000.

Mr MICALLEF: So it is not chickenfeed.

Ms COUZENS: Yes. Can you give us some idea of what strategies you have got in place to roll that work out?

Mr CHRISTOFOROU: Well, that is currently unfunded, the education in schools, and that is one of our recommendations—that the Victorian Government actually consider investing in an education campaign. So I think that that is something that is not being funded at the moment. We are funding the Loddon Campaspe Multicultural Services to deliver X amount of sessions in a number of education settings at the moment through this grant, so we are keen to see that, I guess, rolled out across regional Victoria. That is our focus at the moment—understanding that program a lot better and then sharing that information back to the department to consider what the options might be.

Mr SOUTHWICK: Firstly, thank you to both of you and to the ECCV for the work that they do, and I know Chris ran a good little program in Glen Eira not so long ago which was excellent.

Mr CHRISTOFOROU: Yes, thank you for coming.

Mr SOUTHWICK: I want to pick up on a couple of things. Firstly, your submission talks about under-reporting. To what extent do you think that that is happening, and what do we need to do to fix that? Then the flip side of it is around policing, which you also have mentioned, and I know, Eddie, you mention that briefly in your submission but if you could touch a bit further on that, please.

Mr MICALLEF: Well, under-reporting, I mean, it is not rocket science, the fact that there have only been very few prosecutions. From our interaction with the communities, there is very little understanding of what rights they had and what legislation oversees.

If I can just digress for a second, when I was chairing our health policy committee we did a health literacy paper and that was to bring multicultural communities up to speed with what they are entitled to, what resources are available in the area of health and so on. I think once you have an understanding of how to tap into services in one area, it then correlates that you will be able to tap into services in another area.

But we need to have the support, and we need to take on board these challenges in a more meaningful way. In the past we would get probably about 350 000-odd thousand dollars a year to run our organisation. We could do a lot more with more resources. I am not coming here with my cap in hand, but I am just saying we punch above our weight on a very meagre grant. It has been increased. We have just got an increase, for which we are very thankful to the Government.

I have worked with ministers from both sides, from Nick Kotsiras, Matthew Guy, Robin Scott and the current minister, Richard Wynne, and we have developed good relationships with them. We have got to be able to get into the Parliament, into the Government, into members of Parliament to let them know the challenges and to work with them to come up with challenges. We have worked with the VMC, and I think Vivienne and Maria, to me, are a class act. I do not mind putting that on record, and we are proud to work with them. I think collectively we can work together to achieve some of these shortcomings.

Mr SOUTHWICK: And the policing side? Where do you see that fit?

Mr MICALLEF: The policing side? There is what is called the multicultural unit that they have all the ministers of religion, and I have taken part in that, and there is another multicultural group that the VMC run. So there are two government groups which we feed into to develop policies. I do not know whether they are still active because I was off the main game for a year or two, but I am back in it, and I will be chasing it up to see if they are still in existence.

With the police we took part in those discussions with them many years ago, and the stereotyping stuff has been responded to. The police is a very broad grouping where you have elements within the police that are old school and you have the newer ones. I have spoken to some of the training programs of police, and it has gone over pretty well with inspectors and so on. I have talked about some of my experiences in relating to these communities. I think the police need to be brought up to speed. It is such a massive organisation; to change the culture it takes a lot.

Mr CHRISTOFOROU: Just on that, I will just add that Eddie was referring to the multicultural portfolio reference group—the Victoria Police one—that involves a number of faith groups and which we sit on. They are actually holding a forum I think at the end of March that is actually focusing on hate crime. It is obviously an important issue for Victoria Police, as it is for the communities around that table, so just as a reference.

Mr MICALLEF: I think it would be good for the members of Parliament to sit in on some of these committees just as observers. I see nothing wrong with it because when they used to go to various—Geelong, Latrobe Valley. We used to bring in the local councillors, mayors and so on to open it up and we used to have the community reps along. These sort of forums I think are pretty important to achieve some of those outcomes.

Mr SOUTHWICK: Just on that, do you think the police struggle in terms of when they are reported, and we spoke before about the symbols, quite often just being in a place to take evidence rather than being able to

do something about it and be able to get offensive messages graffitied out? Do you think that there should be able to be more for police to be able to act?

Mr MICALLEF: Yes. I certainly think some of them do struggle, the same way they struggle with domestic violence. You see the lack of training. I think it is all in the—

Mr SOUTHWICK: But there are laws with domestic violence, whereas for taking a hateful image off someone's fence there are not any laws currently.

Mr MICALLEF: Well, still they have the public interest. There are ways they can do it. They can go in—some of it is bluff, some of it is education. Are you asking me whether there should be legislation?

Mr SOUTHWICK: Yes, whether they should have more powers.

Mr MICALLEF: Yes, totally.

Mr SOUTHWICK: One last thing, very much my focus is around early intervention, as you heard before. You mentioned before about a broader definition around discrimination and the intersectionality and stuff, which I agree with. I think that is really important. However, there has been work specifically done around stuff in schools, around Safe Schools. There still does not exist currently things around racial and religious, being able to understand people's different ethnic backgrounds. Do you think that that is something—

Mr MICALLEF: Should be broadened, yes

Mr SOUTHWICK: that is important, something that is basically embedded into our curriculum?

Mr MICALLEF: I think very much so. As I said, you cannot just sort of isolate racism against homophobia, anti-Semitism or other racial—it should be a broader program.

The CHAIR: That concludes the questions. Thank you so much, Eddie and Chris, and of course for your submission on behalf of the EECV. The next steps will be that we have got a number of public submissions to go. At the end of that, all submissions will be deliberated on by the Committee and at the conclusion of that a strong set of recommendations will be put forward for Government to consider on this very important matter. Thank you for being part of this Inquiry.

Mr MICALLEF: Can I just say, if your research people need to come and talk to us about anything or further information, we would welcome it.

The CHAIR: Absolutely. Thank you so much, Eddie.

Witnesses withdrew.