

Growing Grassroots

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Chairperson of the NSW Ethnic Affairs Commission discusses the ways in which ethnic community initiatives have had far reaching consequences in promoting the rights of all Australians.

It is with great pleasure that the NSW Ethnic Affairs Commission (EAC) makes this small contribution to Infocus on the occasion of the 20th anniversary celebrations of the Ethnic Communities' Council of NSW.

As a foundation member of the Ethnic Communities' Council of NSW, I have been in the privileged position of observing at close hand the creativity and perseverance of ethnic communities over the past two decades. I have seen how ethnic community initiatives and hours of voluntary work have come to weave an entirely new social fabric in this State and how other Australian States and Territories have drawn from our experience of community development and interaction.

This ethnic community effort has grown many branches. An early and central branch has been about voicing the presence, readiness to participate and aspirations of ethnic communities in this State. Transmitting the voices and conveying the views of ethnic communities to new spaces and social places has been of fundamental importance in stepping out of the confining cultural legacy of the 50's and early 60's. The creation of the Ethnic

Communities' Council was a turning point in this process of opening up channels of communication across community and national borders.

The Ethnic Communities' Council became the catalyst for the establishment of key institutions such as the Special Broadcasting Service and the NSW Ethnic Affairs Commission. These institutions in turn played a large part in lowering barriers between ethnic communities and in bringing into public view the ideas, experience and expertise that people from diverse cultural backgrounds wish to contribute to society.

In advocating tirelessly for ethnic community concerns, the ECC has not only sown the seeds of institutional development to meet the needs of our culturally diverse society, it has also played a significant role in the consolidation of a community-government partnership approach to ethnic affairs in this State.

A reflection of this approach can be seen in the organisation of the Ethnic Affairs Commission's Policy and Liaison Division, in which the policy and ethnic community liaison functions are integrated and given equal emphasis. Another instance of this approach is to be found in this State's Ethnic Affairs Policy Statement (EAPS) and the Charter of Principles for a Culturally Diverse Society program, in which ethnic community consultation is a core component of policy development and program delivery by NSW Government agencies.

As the Ethnic Affairs Commission moves into a renewed phase of operation we look forward to continuing to work with the ECC to build an even stronger community that increasingly recognises and celebrates the abundance of our culturally diverse society.

On behalf of all the commissioners and staff of the Ethnic Affairs Commission I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate the Ethnic Communities' Council of NSW and all its member organisations on its achievements since its inception 20 years ago, and wish it every success in the future.