

The Member for Mulka has put forward a motion that the Assembly:

1. affirms the NT's obligation to prevent racism and racial discrimination under the positive duty law and calls for system-wide action aligned with the Aboriginal Justice Agreement
2. urges the co-design of an NT anti-racism strategy grounded in the National Anti-Racism Framework and in full alignment with the Aboriginal Justice Agreement.

We hope that the government considers the motion that has been put forward by the Member for Mulka.

**Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim):** Mr Deputy Speaker, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. That is pretty much where we are at on this topic. I prepared to speak on this motion, which then morphed into another motion, which has then morphed into yet another motion on short notice. There is sincerity behind all three versions of those motions, but it has probably flushed out a lack of clarity on the intent behind what is going on.

The Member for Mulka's original motion was divided into two parts. One was calling out racism in its totality and the other was what might be done to reflect on racism, particularly focused on Indigenous people, and regarding the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. The amended motion conflated these two, so we lost the first part of the original motion.

With the best of intentions, the government's amendment—which we are debating now, so I will confine my remarks to that—is a motion that acknowledges harm caused by all forms of racism in a more general form without being prescriptive as to solutions, frameworks, agreements or anything allied to that. That is not to say that we are not supportive of the underlying proposition, but the amendment suggests that the government's position is that it is more important to recognise the entirety of our polity and to broaden the debate.

There is a diversity of opinion in this House on all matters. It is important to remember that, from time to time, the opposition and the crossbench do not operate like one uniform being and neither does the government. At the risk of committing political suicide, I thought the Voice was a pretty good idea and an imperfect step in the right direction. The majority of people in the country disagreed with me and many others, and I respect that is the direction we have gone in now. It appears that the Albanese government, which championed the initiative, has also taken heed of that sentiment and is moving forward accordingly.

In a similarly pragmatic fashion, I will not rage against the machine on a decent motion that has been put forward by the government, which I would like us to pass because it is a good and reasonable motion. By the same token, that is not to diminish the fact that the Member for Mulka specifically wanted us to agree on something that the government, at this point, would like more time to think about.

Having said that, the positive measures that the Member for Mulka outlined are to be lauded. It is a positive thing that we have a man of his stature bringing forward motions to consider racism and what can be practically done to address Indigenous inequality. Rather than tiptoeing around everything, we all need the courage to speak out about the diversity in each of our respective electorates. We all have Indigenous people within our electorates, and we all have electorates that are also filled with multicultural voices, people and faces, which has been the case forever and a day.

The Member for Mulka pointed out that we are not unique in the NT in having to face racism, and that is absolutely the case. I am sorry to hear that he is feeling like he is no longer welcome here. That is a tragic thing to hear; nobody wants to feel that. The Member for Sanderson, in his own way, affirmed the same sentiment.

The idea that everyone is welcome is something we should be getting behind. A starting point is to agree on a baseline proposition before moving forward with how to put things into motion. I am not just interested in talking about motherhood statements either. On 26 March I gave an adjournment speech at length about diversity, multiculturalism and the fact that they are hard-fought gains and do not happen by accident. Laksa festivals do not just happen by accident, and neither does social cohesion or multiculturalism as a state-sponsored policy.

Likewise, I do not think racism disappears by ignoring it and hoping for the best. You have to work actively to encourage people to be tolerant and work together, so I am less libertarian than some of my colleagues in this regard. However, I am more focused on what binds us as common than what divides us. The amendment to the motion by the Attorney-General is a decent one that is asking us to acknowledge harms caused by

racism, to recognise that the government plays a role in supporting a harmonious multicultural society and to call out instances of racial discrimination and, I imagine, discrimination more generally.

The Member for Mulka expressed the sentiment that racism appears to be increasing, which is hard to say. A proposition like that needs to be tested empirically, not just with one-off anecdotal evidence. We all have stories; no one person's voice should be privileged over another. That is why it is not a bad idea to reflect on the data that is relevant in our jurisdiction, so that is what I did, given I am the data guy. I dug up data to use as a baseline in this conversation.

It is much easier to document socioeconomic fragmentation; it is more measurable. It can be done in empirical ways and causality can be assigned, saying that it is the downstream consequence of economic and social policies that have been put in place by multiple governments over a period; you can test it.

As to whether racism is increasing, the first thing to remember is our demographic context. The Northern Territory is the most ethnically, racially and religiously diverse place per capita compared with anywhere else in the country. The mix of that is changing over time, but according to the 2021 Census, the case is that 65% of our population is non-Indigenous. It is a good starting point to remember that whilst we proportionally have the largest Indigenous cohort in the country, we also have proportionally more diversity, and we need to accommodate it.

The peak body to look at that and what happens in the discrimination space is the Anti-Discrimination Commission. In its 2023–24 report, 73% of the complainants were of non-Indigenous heritage, noting there was a total of 317 complainants in that cohort. Of that, only 9% of the complaints were race based; a lot more were disability based. What does that tell us? The first thing we notice is that it is a similar trend to past years, and it is trending down slightly. That does not mean racism is going away. It could mean that under-reporting is occurring or there is conflation of various metrics, but it is loosey-goosey to say racism is on the rise. Racism is not necessarily increasing, but it could be. The key thing is to look at the data we have.

The Australian Human Rights Commission's recent work on the National Anti-Racism Framework Scoping Report from 2022 states that people from culturally diverse backgrounds in Australia, including the NT, regularly face racism and systemic discrimination, limiting access to opportunities like housing and employment compared with Anglo-Australians. Ethnic minorities as well as Indigenous people face systemic disadvantage based on the assertion made in the Australian Humans Rights Commission's report.

What then of institutional racism within government? As has been alluded to, the 2023 report on the Campaign to Combat Racism by Adjunct Professor David Hollinsworth suggested that there was institutional racism, including unconscious bias and discriminatory practices affecting both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in multicultural communities. We also have evidence in reporting to suggest that we have problems within our civil service in that regard, which is something to look at as well.

Young people are not to be forgotten in this equation. The 2024 report, 'It's up to everyone to call it out', by the NT Children's Commissioner, surveyed 284 children and young people aged eight to 19 across the Territory and found that 80% of them reported having seen or experienced racism and 31% stated they had personally experienced racism. These are young people; it is even more insidious in some ways when young people are experiencing this.

These figures indicate that racism affects a broad spectrum of young people in the NT, possibly including those from multicultural backgrounds. We have a large Asian and South Asian community, and trying to control for the data on racism, disadvantage and discrimination in that community is very hard to do. One of the better places you can probably get some information on that is from the 2021 Asian Australian Alliance survey, which had a sample group of 377 people, reporting that 75% of Asian Australians—that is, non-Indigenous people—experienced heightened racial hostility, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, including verbal assaults and physical attacks. That is relevant to Asian communities; I am not suggesting that is specific to the Northern Territory situation, but it is notable that we have a large South Asian and Asian population.

The Scanlon Foundation's Mapping Social Cohesion Survey 2021 is also worth thinking about. The Scanlon Foundation, to reiterate for those who may have forgotten, is an independent not-for-profit research institute that exists as a bridge between academic insights and public thought on matters relating to Australia's social cohesion. The Scanlon Foundation survey reports that 27% of Australians from non-Indigenous, culturally diverse backgrounds reported racial discrimination in the past year, with 18% citing skin colour, ethnic origin or race as the reason.

A final one to think about is racism in the workplace because it goes to the core of what was brought up by the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. The 2023 Diversity Council Australia study finds that 43% of non-white, non-Indigenous employees experience racism at work, including exclusion and stereotyping, and only 25% felt that employers actively address it. There is the rub of it—actively addressing it. I am keen on the idea of us actively addressing things rather than hoping that the market will correct for all errors, particularly when it comes to making sure we maintain a harmonious and diverse society.

That is why on 26 March I spoke at length about the fact that it is great we all go to lots of events, take lots of photos and there are lots of costumes. However, it is a privilege that was hard fought, and we have to keep fighting for it together as a group by concentrating on what unites us rather than what divides us in order to move the debate forward. That is why the motion that has been put forward by the government is sincere in its intent.

What does all this data that I am pointing out really mean? The fact is no-one has a monopoly on the wisdom in this area, and I am not seeking to privilege any one voice or perspective. It probably means that you can fairly say, without getting too carried away, that there is significant quantitative data to suggest that discrimination on the grounds of race is a quantifiable proposition. It is silly to suggest that racism is gone, that racism does not matter or that racism has evaporated; likewise, it is silly to suggest that we should do nothing or can do nothing about it.

I am confining that body of data towards evidencing that there is significant quantitative data to suggest that discrimination on the grounds of race is a quantifiable proposition. However, the quantifiable data suggests that it may be a niche proposition, it may be an under-reported proposition or it may not, in fact, be getting worse, although there is plenty in the Zeitgeist at the moment about the increasing social polarisation within Australia and issues with social cohesion. I will not speculate on why that is the case. I am not interested in that part of it, to be honest; I am interested in how we move together as a group.

What then of the qualitative, because the qualitative speaks to the experience, which is probably more important. Based on the original motion that was on the notice paper, I reached out to a broad swathe of multicultural groups and communities around the Territory to say, 'The Member for Mulka is putting up his motion, which may come up some time soon. If you have any thoughts on racism that you might like to let me know about, I will try to feed them into thinking about how I might contribute to this debate sensibly.' I got a lot of specific responses about people's experiences. Sometimes there are specific axes to grind, if I am honest. Sometimes they pointed out that migrants punch down on other migrants. It is a complex system to explain social cohesion and why it may break down.

I picked out one contribution that I got. With the permission of the person who sent it through to me, I will read it out. The contribution is from Mr Mohammed Raziuddin, President of the United Muslims of Northern Territory. I picked him out because all of you are perking up and thinking, 'I know that fellow. He is a decent guy. He has a lot of decent things to say. He does not seem super partisan. He is running a community services organisation.' Yes, he does it under the label of a Muslim group, and as everyone freely knows around here, that is the faith to which I subscribe as well. I reached out to him because I thought his was a nice summary of many of the other contributions that I received.

The contribution I got reads as follows:

'I strongly support the government's focus on looking at harm caused by racism, especially the ongoing impact on our Indigenous communities. I also commend your intention to broaden the debate to reflect on the experiences of multicultural communities in the Northern Territory.

'From lived experience I can share that racism is still a reality for many people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. For instance, I have witnessed international students and new migrants subjected to racial slurs in public places, and even in professional settings individuals have been overlooked or dismissed because of their accent or their appearance.

'In community work I have supported people who have been denied housing or employment opportunities, not because of a lack of qualifications or references but because of preconceived assumptions tied to their name, skin colour or religion.

'One young man confided that he removed all references to his cultural identity from his resume just to get a call back. Others feel they must suppress their identity to fit in and avoid scrutiny.

'Importantly, many of these individuals express admiration and solidarity with First Nations peoples, seeing parallels in their struggle. There is a strong appetite amongst multicultural communities to walk alongside Indigenous Territorians in the fight against all forms of racism, provided there is room in the conversation to share our own realities as well.'

That is put much more eloquently than I would have tried to put across as a statement, and that is why I am grateful to Mr Raziuddin for sharing that statement so that I could read it out.

I can only fairly reflect on my own experience without wanting to prejudice the debate, so all I will say is this. I grew up here as well and, like everybody, have stories of when I sadly experienced discriminatory practice, either directly or indirectly. I do not reflect on them too hard, but I remember that when I left Darwin to move to Sydney, I really understood what discriminatory practice looked like because it was a whole different ecosystem for me personally compared with growing up here. I realised that, relatively speaking, Darwin was something of a Shangri-La. When I moved to England and spent an awfully long time there, I levelled up again on discovering what real racism looks and feels like. I was grateful for my time in Sydney, and I was grateful evermore for my time in Darwin.

I am not here to say that racism has gone away. I am not here to say that we should not actively work together to try to tackle it. I am here to say that we have it pretty good in the Northern Territory and in Darwin relative to a lot of places in the world, and I want us to work together to keep that as the case. Our chances of that happening improve if we respectfully speak to one another in this place. They would probably also improve in the future if we spoke to each other behind the scenes about what we will talk about and did not change the goalposts, which happens all the time in this parliament; it has been happening for 20-odd years.

It does not always have to be that way, but we could find more common ground if we chose to. We would probably find that our social and economic prospects would improve dramatically if we did this, because there is a range of things we will not be able to tackle in isolation in the Northern Territory without the help of the federal government, the cooperation of one another and building bridges with the wider world.

For that reason, I will be voting on the voices with gusto to support the Attorney-General's amendment to this motion. I think it is a laudable objective to acknowledge the harm caused by racism, whether it is based on race, ethnicity, culture or religion; to recognise the government has a role in preventing discrimination and supporting our harmonious multicultural communities; and to call on everyone—which includes all of us—to stand up and call out racism when it occurs.

I thank the Member for Mulka for bringing this matter to the Chamber and for compelling us all to confront it together. It is only by moving forward together that we stand any chance of maintaining the Northern Territory that we all love and have fond memories of as children.

I support the motion and hope we all can unanimously.

**Mr O'GALLAGHER (Karama):** Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I believe that everyone in this House thinks racism is wrong. I stand with the Member for Mulka for calling out racism in our community, including what he has directly encountered through his own experience. Unfortunately, whether we like it or not, racism exists across the world, always has and sadly will continue.

I can give you many examples from across Europe, the Americas and Asia over the centuries where racism has impacted negatively on many people's lives and has been a contributing factor to wars and conflicts. How can we minimise racism and its impact on people? This is a complex question that I do not have a succinct answer to, and I am not sure anyone else here has either.

I do not believe anyone is born racist. I think they may become racist through their own lived experience, upbringing and values shared with them by their families, friends and local communities. Unfortunately, you cannot fix racism with laws alone. In our freethinking society, we must accept that people have different attitudes, including attitudes that we may personally disagree with. Their lived experience may have influenced them to hold a view contrary to what you and I consider to be acceptable.

I will focus on my electorate of Karama and share some honest yet confronting lived experiences. Some elements of racism occur across and within many of the ethnic communities in my electorate. I am particularly conscious and dismayed that there seems to be a growing divide occurring between some sections of our Indigenous community and other community members in my electorate. That is the reality of what I see.