

**Notes for Presentation of Pierre Yang
to the 39th Australia and Pacific Regional Conference, Perth
1 - 4 November 2021**

The Parliament of Western Australia was established in 1832, with the creation of the Legislative Council. For the first 150 years of its history, cultural diversity among WA's MPs had been gradually rising, notwithstanding most MPs being of Anglo-Celtic heritage.

The pace of increase has picked up since the 1980s, with the first Italian-born MP, the Hon Samuel Piantadosi's election to the Legislative Council in 1983, and the second Italian-born MP, Mr Nick Catania's election to the Legislative Assembly in 1989.

Today, the Parliament of Western Australia has welcomed members born in the British West Indies, Canada, China, Croatia, Fiji, Germany, Hungary, India, Italy, Jamaica, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Sarawak, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Serbia, Ethiopia/Sudan and the United States.

We are proud to have a parliament that reflects our vibrant multicultural Western Australian community.

Notable firsts include:

First Indigenous MP, Hon. Ernie Bridge, Kimberley, elected 1980. He was the first Indigenous person to be elected to a lower house of any Australian Parliament. Also the first Indigenous person to be a Cabinet Minister in any Australian government when he was appointed Minister for Water Resources; the North West; and Aboriginal Affairs, in July 1986.

First Indigenous woman MP of any Australian Parliament, Carol Martin, Kimberley (in succession to Hon. Ernie Bridge), elected 2001.

First Indigenous Treasurer of any Australian Parliament, Ben Wyatt, Victoria Park, elected 2006. Born in Papua New Guinea.

First female WA MP born in a non-English speaking country, Ljiljana Ravlich, East Metro Region, elected 1997. She was born in Croatia, and her family emigrated to WA when she was 5.

First WA MP of Asian heritage, Batong Pham, East Metro Region, elected 2007. Born in Vietnam, his family were Vietnam War refugees in Malaysia before they settled in Perth.

First WA MP of Chinese heritage, Helen Bullock, Mining and Pastoral Region, elected 2009.

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LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

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First WA MP of African heritage, Ayor Makur Chuot, North Metro Region, elected 2021. She is the first South Sudanese MP of any Australian Parliament. She was born in Ethiopia, grew up in South Sudan, then spent 10 years in a refugee camp in Kenya after her family fled civil war.

First Serbian WA MP, Klara Andric, South Metro Region, elected 2021. She is the first Serbian woman MP of any Australian Parliament.

Indigenous Representation in Parliament of WA:

7 Indigenous Australians have been elected as WA MPs.

Ernie Bridge, Carol Martin, Ben Wyatt, Josie Farrer (in succession to Hon. Carol Martin in Kimberley), Zak Kirkup (became the first Indigenous Leader of the Opposition), Divina D'Anna (in succession to Josie Farrer in Kimberley), and Rosie Sahanna (first Indigenous woman elected to the Legislative Council).

Members of Parliament should reflect the people they represent, so what does WA actually look like, in terms of cultural diversity?

WA is one of the most diverse of all the states and territories.

Proportion of people born overseas is larger in WA (32.2%) than the national figure (26.3%).

Conversely, the proportion of Australia-born people is smaller in WA (60.3%) compared to national figure (66.7%).

WA is still continuing to increase in diversity.

As proportion of Australia-born Western Australians has declined (67.7% in 2001, to 60.3% in 2016 census), proportion of overseas-born Western Australians has increased (27.1% in 2001, 32.2% in 2016 census).

More than half of all Western Australians (53.5%) have one or both parents born overseas.

The top 10 birthplaces of Western Australians were England, New Zealand, India, South Africa, the Philippines, Malaysia, China, Scotland, Italy, and Ireland.

For the first time in history, the number of people born in non-main English speaking countries (NMESC) was larger than those from main English speaking countries (MESCC).

In 2016 census, 77.2% of Western Australians indicated that they had a non-Australian ancestry. Amongst the top 10 answers (other than Australian) are: English, Irish, Scottish, Italian, Chinese, German, Indian, Dutch, Filipino. Filipino ancestry replaced New Zealand as the tenth most common response since the last census.

Why is cultural diversity in government so important?

More diverse governments make better decisions.

Cognitive diversity (diversity of thought) comes from factors such as a person's gender, ethnicity, age, differences in social backgrounds and values, industry knowledge or experience. These factors shape the way that people see and understand situations, as well as the mental frameworks that they use to make decisions and solve problems.

1. Diversity in government provides access to a wider pool of knowledge, experience and perspectives, allowing us to consider more ideas, view problems from different angles, and enhance our problem-solving capacity.
2. Diversity reduces vulnerability to blind spots and cognitive biases, as people with different experiences and backgrounds are less likely to make the same errors as a collective.
3. Groups with greater diversity are more likely to voice challenge and dissent, as people expect differences in views and knowledge to be present. Research shows that when a group is diverse, all members voice dissent more persistently and confidently, contributing to richer discussions.
4. Diversity can improve deliberation and analysis. Members in diverse groups are more likely to expect others to think differently and challenge their ideas, leading them to examine information more rigorously, present a thorough case for their opinion, and abandon positions unsupported by the evidence.

In terms of moving forward and taking representation in WA Parliament further, what are some practical steps to do so?

Targets or quotas for cultural diversity would be complex and hard to measure, unlike gender quotas, which have proven to work.

1. Data collection.
Prioritising collecting and publishing data on cultural diversity of candidates, staffer diversity (many MPs have come from backgrounds working as political staffers).
2. Investing in culturally diverse talent pipelines.
Draw on best practice from other jurisdictions to identify and invest in culturally diverse candidates early on: Diversity Fellowship – Victorian Labor, Conservative Party A-List, British Labour's Future Candidates Programme. These could complement already-existing programmes.
3. Building representation into political party structures.
BAME Labour in UK, Pasifika representation built into the structure of New Zealand Labour – guaranteed place in key party decision-making forums.