

7.1.3 Refugee Welcome Zone Declaration

Directorate: Community Wellbeing

Cr Paul Morgan left the Council Chamber at 7.42pm and was absent for the discussion and vote on item 7.1.3.

Purpose

To seek the Council's support to sign the Refugee Welcome Zone Declaration.

Motion

Moved Cr Colleen Gates, seconded Cr Carl Marsich.

That the Council:

- 1. Sign the Refugee Welcome Zone Declaration with the Refugee Council of Australia; and***
- 2. Host a signing ceremony during Refugee Week in June 2014.***

Carried

Report Summary

Hobsons Bay City Council has a strong history of welcoming refugees into the community. The signing of the Refugee Welcome Zone declaration with the Refugee Council of Australia will further highlight the Council's continued commitment to welcome and support refugees into the Hobsons Bay community. By signing the declaration, the Council will join a large number of councils in Victoria and Australia who have made a commitment to welcome refugees, uphold human rights, demonstrate compassion for refugees and enhance cultural and religious diversity in the community. Hosting a public signing ceremony will provide an opportunity to publicly promote the initiative and the Council's commitment to uphold human rights and support refugees.

Background

The Refugee Council of Australia initiative invites local government areas to become Refugee Welcome Zones to acknowledge the important role local government has historically played in assisting refugee settlement and promoting community harmony. Since June 2002, over 80 local government areas have declared themselves Refugee Welcome Zones.

Since the end of the Second World War, Australia has become home to over 800,000 refugees who have made an enormous contribution to the Australian economic, social and cultural life. Over a quarter of Hobsons Bay residents are born overseas, consequently Hobsons Bay is a municipality both rich in, and proud of its cultural, linguistic and religious diversity. The municipality has a growing population of migrants and refugees. Between 2006 and 2013, a total of 5,893 new arrivals settled in Hobsons Bay, including 618 refugees. The Hobsons Bay Asylum Seeker Roundtable held recently, revealed that there are an increasing number of asylum seekers living in the municipality.

Discussion

The Refugee Welcome Zone declaration is a commitment in spirit to welcoming refugees into the community, upholding the human rights of refugees, demonstrating compassion for refugees and enhancing cultural and religious diversity in the community. The process of becoming a Refugee Welcome Zone simply involves the Council's commitment by signing the declaration.

By signing the declaration, the Council will be acknowledging the continued commitment to welcoming refugees and asylum seekers to our municipality and provide an opportunity to acknowledge the contributions refugees have made to Australian society over the years. The act of signing the declaration will assist in the promotion of harmony, social cohesion and respect for human rights in our local community. The declaration will help to raise awareness about the issues affecting refugees and asylum seekers, foster the culture of mutual respect and promote the appreciation of cultural diversity.

The Refugee Council of Australia encourages councils to hold a public signing ceremony which would be appropriate to hold in June 2014, during Refugee Week. This would provide an opportunity to acknowledge the work of local groups and services that support refugees and asylum seekers. A representative from the Refugee Council of Australia would be invited to the event to present the Council with a Certificate of Appreciation.