



ITALIAN CONSULATE

Mr PICCOLO (Light) (12:05): I rise in support of this motion and I also welcome the support from the Leader of the Opposition and the Liberal Party. I would like to mention at the outset that I do not have any difficulties in tracing my origins. I was born in Italy. I am not a fake Italian or an instant Italian: I am a real one, but I am also Australian as well.

I wish to start my comments with some quotes from people who have emailed me over this matter, as I think they put the issue into context. They also put into context how important this motion is to the parliament and that it is important that we lobby the commonwealth government as well.

I quote from an email received from the Italian-Australian youth movement relating to preventing the closure of the consulates in both Adelaide and Brisbane:

I am of the firm belief that our chances of best beating this threat is with a united and coordinated national approach, as these closures won't just affect Italians living in South Australia and Queensland but those in the other states of Victoria, New South Wales and Western Australia too, placing further pressure on already underfunded and under resourced Consulates.

It is quite clear that these closures not only impact on our state but our whole nation. Another email about this motion from an Italian community leader states:

The support from the SA State Parliament and nationwide and the outcome of debate during the forthcoming Australia-Italia MP forum—

in Adelaide, and I will come to that bit later—

will be crucial to convey to the Italian Government the importance to maintain the consular offices in Adelaide and Brisbane.

I would like to reaffirm the comments made by the Premier in this place just a few days ago. There are a couple of quotes that I think need to be restated, because they very quickly and clearly get to the point of why this decision by the Italian government needs to be strongly opposed by not only people of Italian origin but all of us as a nation. The Premier stated, 'It will also be a body blow to the local Italian community affairs given the central role the Consulate plays.' That is very important. The consulate is not just an office: it provides an important facilitating role, helping to bring community organisations together. Without that, it could impact significantly on the Australian-Italian community.

Importantly, this comes at a time when the state government has supported a number of programs to improve trade, culture and education between South Australia and Italy and, therefore, needs to be strongly opposed. I want to read from the petition which has been circulated, as follows:

We, the undersigned, all being Italian citizens and/or residents of Australia, wish to express our strong opposition to the closure of the Consulates of Adelaide and Brisbane. The Consular network is a fundamental part of the Italian presence abroad. We believe that with the closure of the Adelaide and Brisbane Consulates, Italian citizens and residents of Adelaide and Brisbane will not be able to maintain contact with the Italian State/authorities and they will not have their rights protected as they will not be able to comply with their duties. We urge you to review the decision and maintain the Consular posts of Adelaide and Brisbane as part of an efficient and modern diplomatic network in Australia.

Today, not only do I speak as the member for Light in this parliament, but also I speak as a member of the Australian-Italian MP Forum of which I am the national convenor. That forum will have its next meeting in Adelaide on 2 and 3 July in this place, and this matter will be on the agenda. I have no doubt that MPs from across Australia will fully support the actions of this parliament.

That group, which is a bipartisan group, focuses on what we have in common and how we can work to

support the Italian-Australian community; this is one way we can show our political strength to support it. A key objective of the forum is to promote and strengthen cultural, educational and economic ties between Australia and Italy. In particular, the forum seeks to strengthen the relationship between Italo-Australians and Italians and vice versa.

With the closure of the consulate offices in these two states, it does undermine that objective of the forum. To strengthen this relationship, we need to promote contemporary as well as traditional Italian culture in Australia, and it is important for us to have a consulate office here. Importantly, the forum seeks to work alongside existing Italian-Australian organisations and institutions to support them in achieving their aims and objectives. I would add very strongly that the support we received from the consulate network has been very important in our achieving our objective as a group of MPs across this nation.

As new and emerging immigrant communities settle in Australia, their needs will attract growing government attention. While this is natural and appropriate, we must work together to ensure that established communities like the Italian-Australian community are not forgotten or left behind. By closing the Italian Consulates in Adelaide and Brisbane, that is exactly what the Italian government is doing: enabling people to forget that we are here and how important we are in the contribution we have made as a group to Australia.

Since the unification of Italy, almost 27 million Italians have migrated from Italy across the world. I seek leave to have inserted in *Hansard* a table outlining the migration from Italy around the world, because it is very important to this debate.

Leave granted.

Table 1 1876-1985 Emigration and Migration rate (per 1,000)

	Emigration	Migration Rate
1876-1885	1,315	4.56
1886-1895	2,391	7.76
1896-1905	4,322	13.06
1906-1914	5,854	20.60
1876-1914	13,882	11.01
1915-1918	363	2.44
1919-1928	3,007	7.70
1929-1940	1,114	2.20
1941-1945	4,121	0.32
1946-1955	423	5.24
1956-1965	3,166	6.28
1966-1975	1,714	3.20
1946-1975	7,351	4.86
1976-1985	861	1.53
Total	26,595	

Mr PICCOLO: Over 26 million Italians have left Italy since unification seeking a better life across the world, from the north initially to Europe and from the southern parts to the Americas and Australia. They left because of economic hardship. Italian migrants have made enormous contributions to Italy, ironically, by leaving because they made growth eventually possible by reducing demand on the services and

resources of that nation but, more importantly, they have introduced Italian culture to other nations, and that has boosted trade across the world.

As other members of Italian origin would acknowledge, often Italian migrants have sent money back to Italy to support other family members, thereby helping the Italian state. It is unfortunate that the Italian political system since unification has, on many occasions, abandoned the Italian migrants. Families were forced to leave their country of birth because of economic hardship and because the systems in place did not support their own people. My own family is one of those. We come from the South. Many left Italy because of economic hardship, corruption and a whole range of other things where the Italian state could not support them.

Today, with this decision, the Italian government is abandoning these migrants once again. It abandoned them and forced them to migrate; now it is abandoning these people and their countries where they have made their new home. This decision reinforces how sometimes the Italian government cannot get it right.

By reducing the number of consulates, it reduces access to services and the Italian government. This decision will not only damage Italy's reputation in Adelaide and across Australia but also across the world at a time when Italy is trying to play a more important and significant role in international affairs, as it should. It is one of the great nations in this world alongside Australia.

Ironically, as Italy seeks to play an important role internationally, it is now seeking to reduce its role in those communities where it has the most support in places like Adelaide and Brisbane and other places in America from which the Italian government and the Italian nation have received a lot of support but from which they are now seeking to withdraw inappropriately.

Support for Italian migrants abroad, as I mentioned, has been variable over the years and has significantly improved recently; I include South Australia and Australia as well. For the Italian government now to reverse that support for Italian migrants would be a shameful act and would be a gross betrayal of the Italian-Australian community.