

■ The Honourable Sophie Cotsis, MLC

## Community Language Schools Adjournment Speech

*The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS  
[10.13 p.m.]:*

I congratulate the Keneally Government for its vision and initiative in providing support to our culturally and linguistically diverse communities through its major package supporting community languages. Today is an historic day for many advocates, including volunteers, local community groups, parents and local parish communities who organise community language schools. I acknowledge also many of my hard-working colleagues, in particular, those whose electorates include a number of community language schools, for their support in the advancement of community languages. Premier Kristina Keneally, Minister for Education and Training, Verity Firth, and Attorney General, and Minister for Citizenship, John Hatzistergos, announced that the New South Wales Government will more than double funding for community language schools. The New South Wales Government will spend \$8.1 million over four years which will go directly towards resources such as new textbooks and equipment for students. Significantly, the Keneally Government will ensure that funding will be adjusted annually to ensure that the Government's support keeps pace with inflation—a first for community language schools in Australia. Every week in New South Wales more than 30,000 children attend community lan-



guage schools. Classes are offered in 48 languages and are provided in hundreds of locations across the State by approximately 2,000 volunteers. Classes are offered after school or at weekends. Most children have already developed the basics of language in the family home, so community language schools focus on helping them to learn to read or write and develop a higher order vocabulary. During my primary and high school years I attended the community language Greek school, often after school and sometimes twice a week. I understand the big commitment made by my family and by other families to ensure the learning of a second language. Being bilingual helped me in my studies. It was important and enriching to learn the language of my ancestors. I learned about our heritage, culture and traditions and I learned grammar,

writing, reading, geography, history, music and art. Most importantly, it provided me with a sense of identity and understanding about the benefits of diversity. For our children and their children, learning another language is becoming a vital part of the basic preparation for an increasing number of careers as it enhances mobility across the world and provides endless opportunities. As a passionate advocate for learning other languages the benefits are many. It enhances the cultural and social cohesion of our society. From an employment, economic and skills perspective in particular, as New South Wales is the financial and economic hub in the Asia-Pacific region, the greater advancement of our economic development through the understanding of other cultures and speaking other languages puts us in a far better competitive

position and further strengthens our links with overseas businesses and trade. I emphasise the importance of community language teachers, some of whom are volunteers who have been teaching children for up to 30 or 40 years. They should be congratulated for their commitment, dedication and passion in education and for their teaching of community languages. The New South Wales Government recognises the valuable service and enormous contribution that community language teachers provide across communities ensuring that children in our State maintain strong links with their heritage through language. The New South Wales Government also helped to establish certificate accreditation in community language teaching at Wollongong University, assisting volunteer teachers to attain professional accreditation. Those volunteers deserve the Government's support. I commend the Government for recognising their importance and for providing professional development opportunities, further supporting the high standards of teaching and language skills across New South Wales. Research indicates that other positives are associated with learning another language. It connects children with their family culture and traditions and it has a positive effect on their intellectual growth, which enriches and enhances their development. I congratulate Jozefa Sobski, Chair of



the Community Languages Schools Board and President of the New South Wales Federation of Community Language Schools. I congratulate also Albert Vella and many other people from the community who for some time have been advocating for this package. This is a great investment in the future of our children and in the future of a culturally diverse New South Wales. I highly commend the Government for putting together this support package.

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## NSW Government to develop online Multicultural Business Directory with NSW Ethnic Communities Council

*Premier Kristina Keneally announced the NSW Government will develop an online multicultural business directory with the ethnic communities and multicultural councils in NSW - to support and promote culturally diverse businesses and jobs.*

Premier Keneally made the announcement at the NSW Ethnic Communities Council's 35th anniversary, where she presented awards to council members for their decades of service to the organisation.

Deputy Premier Carmel Tebbutt, Minister for Local Government, Barbara Perry, Member for Cabramatta, Nick Lalich, Member for Lakemba, Robert Furolo, Member for Smithfield, Ninos Khoshaba, and Member of the Legislative Council, Sophie Cotsis also attended the event.

The NSW Government will provide \$15,000 to the NSW Ethnic Communi-

ties Council to help develop an online multicultural business directory to promote the wide range of culturally diverse businesses in NSW.

The NSW Ethnic Communities Council will lead the project in consultation the Ethnic Communities Council of Newcastle and the Hunter, Multicultural Communities Council of the Illawarra and the Multicultural Council of Wagga Wagga.

Industry & Investment NSW will provide in kind assistance with the design, development and hosting of the website.

"The development of an online multicultural business directory sends a clear message about the importance the NSW Government places on cultural diversity in our State," Ms Keneally said.

Chair of the NSW Ethnic Communities Council Jack Passaris has welcomed the business directory and said,

"The directory will increase access to government and community-based services such as interpreters, translators, bilingual educators, disability, family and children's services that meet diverse cultural and linguistic needs."

The NSW Government has also guaranteed the four councils will receive triennial funding from 2011.

This means councils will not have to compete with other organisations for funding each year and will help councils secure services and staffing arrangements to ensure important programs for culturally diverse communities continue.

"Since 1975, the NSW Ethnic Communities Council has played an invaluable role representing and supporting the culturally diverse community we are fortunate to enjoy here in NSW," Ms Keneally said.

"The NSW Ethnic Communities



Council provides a number of important projects for the community, including the ethnic communities sustainable living project and home and community care programs for the disabled."

The Ethnic Communities Council of NSW also officially launched their new website

<http://www.eccnsw.org.au/> and new Building Inclusive Communities Awards with Macquarie University at the event.