

# Harnessing ethnic power

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## **20 Years of the ECC of NSW - Special Edition of Infocus, July/August 1995**

### **George Wojak**

Former chairperson of both the ECC of NSW  
and FECCA, gives his historical perspective of  
the development of an ethnic voice.

Australia's growth and development materially  
and culturally since the second World War has  
been unprecedented, and was only possible due  
to mass migration including many people from  
non-English speaking countries of Europe, Asia,  
Middle East, Africa and South America.

Not only have there been economic benefits for  
Australia, but the quality of life has been  
enriched by the social, political, cultural and  
linguistic contributions made by ethnic groups.  
Australia's humanitarian and non-  
discriminatory migration policies of family  
reunion and refugees have enhanced Australia's  
international credibility and viability.

The ECC of NSW was established in 1975 to  
represent the interests of ethnic communities.  
The Council has always been a great catalyst in  
relation to social welfare, legal issues, education,  
immigration, cultural activities and in  
advocating for equity and access for services and  
resources for ethnic communities.

As the credibility and expertise of the Council  
grew, so too did the demands placed on its  
resources. As the Council continued to  
demonstrate its viability as consultant, advocate,  
catalyst and forum, so also did the demands  
increase from ministers, governments and

authorities.

Many competing claims were placed upon the  
Council from its members, ethnic communities  
and government instrumentalities. This period  
in fact saw a virtual explosion of activity within  
the ECC which was reflected in the increase of  
voluntary participation and the number of staff.  
It is within this context that it became crucial to  
determine clear priorities and to abide by them,  
and to set goals which could be achieved and  
evaluated.

The Council's membership is its strength. The  
Council has no life independent of its members.  
It is a structure set up to be responsible to the  
needs of its members and to be powerful  
enough to reflect changes. As an organisational  
model we are unique in bringing together  
people and communities representing the full  
diversity of languages, cultures and  
backgrounds.

We are an active, living example of the ability of  
people to maintain their differences whilst  
joining together in causes and issues which  
unite them. We need, in fact, to be ambassadors  
for the Council - lending our established  
strength to emerging communities and at the  
same time learning from them and their issues,  
and encouraging their involvement in the  
processes of the Council.

The Council has always supported and indeed  
become a chief advocate of multiculturalism.  
Multiculturalism is based on recognition and  
respect for human dignity and work, equality of  
opportunity, and strength in diversity. Part of  
this is the richness of the Australian social fabric  
and the recognition of the cultural and  
linguistic contribution made by all people of  
this great country of ours.

Much is still to be done and it can only be done

by participation, input and contributions from ethnic communities. Allow me now to pay tribute to the commitment, devotion and support of all those involved with the ECC of NSW over the past 20 years, and I look forward with optimism and enthusiasm to the coming years.