



Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland

Submission to the Crime & Misconduct Commission Inquiry into the move-on powers in Queensland

The Ethnic Communities' Council of Queensland (ECCQ) wishes to make a brief submission in the Commission's Inquiry into the move-on powers.

ECCQ believes these powers have the potential to be used in a way which unfairly targets and discriminates against visible minority groups, particularly younger people.

ECCQ believes it is highly likely these powers are already being used in a discriminatory way, particularly against younger male residents and citizens who are of African or Middle Eastern background.

ECCQ is a peak body, rather than a service delivery agency, and we do not have the resources to conduct comprehensive research into the extent of this problem, but anecdotal evidence provided to ECCQ from time to time by people who work with and for African and Muslim communities in South East Queensland reinforce this concern.

While ECCQ does not represent Indigenous Australians, there are also strong concerns that these powers are used in a way which discriminates unfairly against Indigenous people of all ages.

ECCQ supports and reinforces the concern expressed by the Youth Affairs Network of Queensland (YANQ) in their submission to this Inquiry.

Social attitudes and subconsciously discriminatory perceptions may mean that some people in our society feel uneasy when they see groups of younger people from a minority ethnic background.

But this is a justification for seeking to address and improve those attitudes, not to criminalise or target the people of minority background when they are not breaking any laws.

The move-on powers are so broad and discretionary that they create a significant possibility of inappropriate and improper use.

Not only does this increase the risk of injustices and unfairness being inflicted on innocent people, it also runs the risk of being counter-productive for society as a whole, by reducing the prospects of social inclusion for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

ECCQ is not suggesting that our society is full of people with discriminatory attitudes to people of minority racial or religious backgrounds, or is any worse than any other society in this regard.

It is sad but obvious that there are some in our community with discriminatory attitudes, as some of the recent violent activities towards non-white Australians last Australia Day starkly demonstrated.

True, the mere sighting of a group of young people, especially a group of young people with dark skin, will cause some members of our community to feel anxious. But the prejudices of some should not be used as a basis for the use of coercive police powers against young people.

Giving police the power to forcibly move people on when they are doing nothing wrong, just because other people experience anxiety, can reward and reinforce discriminatory attitudes, while increasing a sense of grievance and isolation against those who are being unfairly targeted.

ECCQ agrees with the views expressed by YANQ that the effect of this discrimination against young people will increase feelings of alienation.

At best, this reduces social harmony and the prospects of cohesive social integration.

At worst, it can lead to increased division and crime. Some people, regardless of their ethnic background, react to unfair treatment by authorities in a negative way.

As YANQ states in their submission, “by continuing a policy that favours short term benefits to a few, while ignoring the long-term costs to many, the Queensland Government is putting community safety at risk.”

ECCQ encourages further research to document all uses of the move-on powers, and to obtain the views not only of the police who used them but also the views of those subjected to them.

It is important to establish how often people who are subjected to these powers feel they were used unfairly or unjustly, to establish a clearer picture of how often these widely discretionary powers have been used inappropriately or unfairly.

Approaches to public safety and law enforcement that work with young people and visible minorities, rather than targets them, are far more likely to improve both public safety and social inclusiveness.

This may involve long-term approaches which take more effort and are harder to measure statistically, but it will still provide greater benefits and less cost to society over time.



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