

# Demetriou speaks on diversity

4:30 PM Mon 06 Dec, 2010



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Below is a speech delivered by AFL CEO Andrew Demetriou to a diversity forum organised by the Diversity Council of Australia.

Thankyou to the Diversity Council of Australia for inviting me to speak here today.

As the son of migrants, it's always great to be at a forum like this discussing a subject close to my heart. Indeed, it seems whatever I do in football I'm reminded of my cultural heritage.

This year I was awarded Tool of the Week on Channel 10's Before the Game. For those of you who haven't seen the show, each week they give away a power tool to the person they think has been the biggest ... well, you know what.

My award was not for some atrocity I committed at the AFL but for admitting on Neil Mitchell's program that I went to a George Michael concert.

When I asked why, I said because he was a good Cypriot. Or at least he was until he recently went to jail.

As some of you may know, my parents are from Cyprus and I'm very proud of my heritage. I'm even happy to be referred to as a Greek.

In fact just the other day I received a letter from a woman who said she'd seen me on TV and wanted to say how much she enjoyed Zorba the Greek.

I'm still trying to work out whether she was serious or not. At least it made a change from those letters I receive accusing me of destroying the game.

But I think what both these stories show is how migrants have been accepted into Australia and become part of the cultural fabric to the point where we are comfortable having a joke at each other's expense but still respectful of our different backgrounds.

As I said when I launched the report of the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council earlier this year, Australia is a land of great opportunity. It's provided a wonderful life for immigrants from all over the world.

In return, they've enriched Australia with a cultural diversity and harmony that's the envy of many other countries.

The benefits of cultural diversity are around us for all to see. It engages our senses and expands our horizons. It's also good for the economy. Many immigrants have formed the engine room of small business in this country.

Each wave of immigration has brought with it new skills, new ambition and new energy, while blending with the foundations established by previous waves of people from all over.

New cultures and their backgrounds and experience bring new ideas, fertilizing and improving the old. All this has made Australia a stronger, more tolerant and more outward looking nation. We have witnessed it in fields of endeavour such as science, the arts, education, fashion, food and sport. We have experienced it right across the community.

But it's not to say that we don't have some way to go. While immigrants of European heritage have been welcomed into Australia without too many difficulties, it hasn't always been the same story for those from Asia, Africa or the Middle East.

I think this has been reflected in Australian football which has produced names like Barassi, Jesaulenko and Dipierdomenico. There was even a bloke called Demetriou.

But for some reason players of African and Asian descent have been slower to gravitate to our game despite the huge influx of migrants from both continents in recent years.

I'm pleased to say this is slowly changing. We are now seeing some very talented young Sudanese players like Majak Daw coming through our junior ranks into the AFL and we've all been captivated by the story of young Muslim player Bachar Houli.

We're also very proud of the number of indigenous players in AFL ranks. In 2010 we had 85 indigenous players listed with AFL clubs, about 11 per cent of the total AFL playing list. That's more than double the number of indigenous players just a decade ago.

What's more, many of these players have gone onto make an important contribution to the community beyond the football field. Michael Long is a classic example.

We recently appointed Michael O'Loughlin as the first indigenous coach of the AIS-AFL Academy. We're also delighted to have Chris Johnson and now Andrew McLeod in our ranks, giving something back to the game and the indigenous communities that mean so much to them.

But like any workplace or industry we still face many challenges. Recently we held our industry conference on the Gold Coast. One of the sessions focused on diversity and what we needed to do as an industry to embrace the changing face of Australia.



AFL chief executive Andrew Demetriou

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