



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**THE SENATE**

**PROOF**

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Australian Sikh Games**

**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 15 June 2010**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

---

## SPEECH

**Date** Tuesday, 15 June 2010  
**Page** 98  
**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Furner, Sen Mark

**Source** Senate  
**Proof** Yes  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Senator FURNER** (Queensland) (7.21 pm)—On Good Friday this year it was my great honour and privilege to attend the 23rd Australian Sikh Games held at Tingalpa in eastern Brisbane—and I know that you, Madam Acting Deputy President Moore, were there enjoying the games as well. I extend my congratulations to the Punjabi Cultural Association of Queensland, the organising committee of the games and also the Australian National Sikh Sports and Cultural Council for the opportunity to attend and enjoy the various displays of sporting skill and rich cultural and community spirit evidenced by participants and spectators alike. It is due to the dedication and skill of these organisations and, of course, the Sikh people they represent across Australia that these games are the long-term success that they clearly are.

I can think of nothing more typically Australian than a celebration of the history and achievements of a community through the pursuit and love of sport. For me, the quality of the competition, the camaraderie and the skill displayed embodied the strengths of the Sikh culture and the values that have ensured the continued survival and flourishing of Sikh communities both in this country and throughout the world. The Sikh Games began as an intrastate hockey tournament with five teams in Adelaide in 1988. From those humble beginnings they have grown into a national event. This year the Sikh Games had 115 teams participating, including teams for cultural events, making it the most highly participated in games yet. This year's participation comprised 18 kabaddi teams, 18 soccer teams, 26 cricket teams, 10 volleyball teams, eight touch football teams, four netball teams, five field hockey teams and three tug of war teams. Additionally, there were participants involved in golf, wrestling, athletics, bhangra, giddha and gatka. The main events were held at the sportsground in Tingalpa and the other events were held at four different locations throughout Brisbane with around 30,000 people in attendance.

The event has expanded to not only include representatives from every state but also welcome international competitors. Anyone who assumes that these games are just about sport would be very much mistaken. That assumption would be quickly dispelled upon arrival at the games. The games are a celebration, a reunion and a warm invitation to newcomers to get involved and explore. Among the other important

statistics of these games are that they included teams ranging from under 13s to over 45s and there were five womens soccer teams and four womens netball teams.

The ties that bind the Australian Sikh community are strong, and the willingness to preserve its heritage can only be assisted by the openness with which newcomers and the curious are welcomed. These games not only provide an opportunity for Sikhs from across all states to compete in the games; they also allow the thousands who attend to remain connected to their communities and friends and families from across Australia and the globe. I note that, in the men's open soccer, Brisbane defeated Sydney 2-1—and I am sure that score will be reflected in the State of Origin tomorrow night!

It should be noted that the Sikh contribution to Australia began early, with estimates suggesting that Sikhs have been present in Australia since the late 19th century. It is an impressive legacy that continues to this day and can be seen in the unique character and spirit of Sikh and Punjabi-Australian culture. These games and the social and musical activities that accompany them are in the best tradition of that spirit. While the Sikh community have their own set of beliefs and customs, they are still Australians and they are a very welcome part of our society.

I believe sport has lifelong health and social benefits that are invaluable to the individual, their community and ultimately the country. This country is able to boast an excellent level of participation in sport. The challenge we now face is to not just maintain this level of participation but ensure it is reflected across all cultural and community groups. In my role as a senator for Queensland, it has been a source of great satisfaction and pride to be part of a Labor government that not only values the contribution made by sport but is prepared to back that up with action and support. Of particular relevance within the context of culture and sport was the announcement of the All Cultures program by the Minister for Sport, Kate Ellis, on 25 March. The minister joined with the Australian Sports Commission and leading national sports to promote the program, which aims to connect people from new migrant groups with their local sporting clubs. She said:

We want to make sure that people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds can reap the lifelong

health and social benefits of sport. Many of our grassroots and elite sports are missing out on the new skills and greater participation rates that the involvement of people from diverse origins can bring. I want to see a multicultural sporting landscape that includes players, coaches, officials, administrators and supporters from different cultural origins. The Australian Sports Commission's All Cultures program aims to lift low participation rates by providing advice to the Australian sporting sector about how to be more inclusive. Now is the time for sporting groups across the nation to consider how they can better involve people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

It is my sincerest wish that all communities in Australia embrace the spirit of competition and fraternity that the Sikh community so comprehensively demonstrated throughout these games. Notwithstanding my involvement in the 23rd Sikh Games this year, I was privileged to be welcomed for the first time to the Brisbane Sikh Temple at Eight Mile Plains one week before the 2007 federal election. I accepted with enthusiasm an invitation to attend a Sikh temple for the first time. Although my experience was different from my own religious beliefs the friendship, acceptance and food provided by the Sikhs made me feel very comfortable there. Along with the Sikh Games and the other relationships I have developed with the Indian community, this further added to my view that we are very fortunate in this country to have such a diverse multicultural community. I once again congratulate the organisers of the Punjabi Cultural Association Committee and all those who participated in another successful Sikh Games.