



The Hon Peter Gutwein

The Walk – Step Up Together

Last September the Hon Peter Gutwein decided to walk from Burney to Glenorchy in Tasmania covering 350 km. Then in October he walked from Launceston to Canberra (flying to Sydney). This remarkable journey aimed to raise awareness and funds for a more inclusive and compassionate Tasmania. He spoke to NEHAD KENANIE.

Why were you driven to take The Walk to a national platform?

In May, I had become concerned by increasing reports of racist behaviour in Tasmania, including incidents of racial vilification. As the Chair of Migrant Resource Centre Tasmania, I could issue a media statement condemning the behaviour –or I could take action, starting an enduring conversation in the media and community to positively highlight the contributions of people from a migrant and refugee background.

The Walk in Tasmania went from Burnie to Glenorchy, about 350 kilometres, passing through many towns where each day I had the opportunity to walk and talk with members of the migrant and refugee community, bringing to media and the broader public their stories and the positive contributions they make to Tasmania. This initiative attracted significant public interest, and the support of businesses around the State, from major corporates such as Hazell Bros and the Tasmanian Hospitality Association, to national level sporting

organisations, such as the Tasmanian Football Club, which know all too well the importance of multiculturalism and how this enriches their organisations.

In the weeks post the Tasmanian Walk, the Multicultural Framework review was handed down in Federal Parliament and the number one recommendation was that both sides of federal politics should reaffirm their support for a multicultural Australia. As about 30 per cent of Australians were born overseas, I thought that was sensible and needed as we are without doubt a multicultural country.

Despite calls from national migrant and refugee organisations, there was no reaffirmation. This absence of leadership at a national level prompted me to take The Walk nationally, from Tasmania to Canberra. I took this request directly to the office of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition to seek their reaffirmation and support for a multicultural Australia. Pleasingly, each supported that reaffirmation and helped to amplify the symbolism and message that we are, simply, better together.



The Walk, Better Together, in October 2024, garnered the support of numerous national organisations, particularly Downer, Altus, Canberra Airport and the Australian Hotels Association, as well as sporting organisations such as GWS Giants and Football Australia.

What insights did you gain from The Walk and were there any memorable moments?

On both walks, I met hundreds of people from diverse backgrounds. Hearing their stories was incredibly moving. Many had endured incredible challenges just to be here, and to see them contributing to Australia's society and economy in such a positive way was so inspiring. Many experiences shared on these walks will stay with me for a lifetime.

In Burnie, I met an Indian General Practitioner who had been a family doctor serving that community for more than 25 years. When he arrived, he was only the fifth Indian resident in the region, and we discussed the challenges faced over the years of integrating into a predominantly white community with little experience of multiculturalism. Today he has a successful practice, is

a much loved and respected GP serving the health care needs of that community.

In Sydney, I met a Palestinian builder who came here more than 40 years ago as a child. He has made a successful life here while building homes across the State, and now employs thousands of people – many from multicultural backgrounds – helping to solve the housing challenge.

In Hobart, I met a Syrian woman who came as a refugee. She thanked me profusely for doing The Walk and said she felt seen for the first time. When I asked her about her journey, she told me that when she first fled, she had walked with her children nearly 1300 km to escape persecution and find safety. This made me weep.

You must have had time also for personal reflection?

Walking for such long distances, particularly on the isolated rural roads between Sydney and Canberra, provides ample time for reflection.

It was during this time I reflected on what more can be done in Australia to raise awareness of the positive contribution of migrant and refugee Australians. Stories



Photo courtesy of The Hon Peter Gutwein

shape our understanding, and with understanding comes compassion. Compassion leads to kindness. I believe if we find a way to sustain a positive conversation at a national level, then ultimately it will lead to a kinder and more inclusive Australia. That remains my aim.

How did community leaders react to The Walk?

Throughout The Walk I met community and business leaders who were incredibly supportive, as well as politicians of all persuasions. It was clear that diversity and inclusiveness are highly valued in their organisations. Gaining the reaffirmation that I sought from both the Prime Minister and the Opposition Leader on the final day of The Walk for a Multicultural Australia gave me great hope that their ambition is also for a kinder, more inclusive nation. They were both very supportive of the message and intent of the initiative.

How does multiculturalism shape a better Australia?

I strongly believe it builds a stronger Australia, socially and economically. A diverse society enhances social cohesion and promotes tolerance and acceptance. Sharing traditions, food and art enhances

our cultural awareness and appreciation, broadening perspectives and enriching our cultural fabric. I believe immigration and multiculturalism lead to a more diverse and skilled workforce, it leads to creativity, innovation and collaboration through new ideas and ways of working, which ultimately helps to strengthen our economy.

What are your views for the future of multiculturalism in Australia?

As a migrant who defied the odds and was fortunate enough to become Premier, I am passionate about the importance of a multicultural Australia, and I hold the fundamental belief that all Australians, regardless of their colour, race, circumstance or background, have the right to be safe, happy and to have equal opportunity.

Multiculturalism is not just a part of Australia's identity, but a cornerstone of its future. By leveraging the strengths of diversity, Australia can build a more innovative, resilient and prosperous society, one that thrives on inclusivity and global collaboration.

The Walk took just the first steps towards a much-needed positive national conversation. R