

## 6.2 HOME TO BILOELA

Submitting Councillor: Dr Josh Fergeus

### **MOTION**

*That Council:*

- 1. Supports the return of Priya and Nades Murugappan and their daughters Kopika and Tharnicaa to their home in Biloele, in line with the wishes of their community;*
- 2. Writes to the Minister for Home Affairs, Karen Andrews MP, detailing Council's support for their return.*

### **BACKGROUND**

Council is an important organisation in the community and plays a vital role providing leadership on a range of substantive issues.

The City of Monash has made a commitment to welcoming refugees into the community, upholding the human rights of refugees, and demonstrating compassion for refugees as a result of signing the Refugee Welcome Zone Declaration in 2002.

Over recent years, Council has supported the Palm Sunday Walk for refugees, Amnesty Victoria's My New Neighbour campaign, and is a leading member within the Local Government Mayoral Taskforce on People Seeking Asylum.

### **DISCUSSION**

Before they met in Australia, Priya and Nades lost many years of their lives to war and conflict. They came to Australia legally under international and Australian law. The conditions of the bridging visas issued to Priya and Nades after they arrived in Australia almost ten years ago did not allow them to leave the country. They have been here ever since. They abided by the conditions of their bridging visas, obeyed Australia's laws, paid taxes and contributed to the community.

They and their two girls Kopika and Tharnicaa have now been held in detention for more than 1000 days. For Tharnicaa, who is three years old, this is almost her entire life.



Photo: Tharnicaa and Kopika Murugappan, the Australian-born daughters of the detained Biloela Tamil family

In Biloela, a small town in regional Queensland, Priya and Nades found peace and safety. After everything they had been through, they believed Australia would protect them. In May 2015, they welcomed their daughter Kopika into the world. Her sister Tharnicaa was born in June 2017. The girls were born in Australia and have never lived in another country.

Recently Tharnicaa was evacuated from Christmas Island where the family are detained to hospital in Perth, requiring urgent treatment for a suspected blood infection. She had previously been very unwell for a period of 10 days without appropriate medical treatment.



Photo: Tharnicaa in hospital in early June 2021.

The home affairs minister, Karen Andrews, has the power to intervene at any point and allow the family to remain in Australia under Section 195A of the Migration Act.

Banana Shire Council Mayor Neville Ferrier has spoken on behalf of the Biloela community on many occasions, stating that the family should be returned to Biloela and that the community would “keep battling till they can get them home”<sup>1</sup>.

### **RELEVANCE TO COUNCIL PRIORITIES**

This report is in line with Council’s commitment to multiculturalism and to the principles of human rights, access and equity and social justice. In practice Monash Council has demonstrated this commitment through the following initiatives:

- A Healthy and Resilient Monash: Integrated Plan 2017-2021
- Council Plan 2017-2021
- Council’s position on the Executive of the Mayoral Taskforce on the Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS)
- Being a supporter of the ‘Racism it Stops with Me’ campaign since its introduction in 2012
- Being a signatory to the Refugee Welcome Zone Declaration since 2002 and as such having Monash declared a Refugee Welcome Zone
- Being a signatory to the Joint Statement in support of allocation of resources to Councils by the Australian Government to provide appropriate responses to the complex needs of asylum seekers living in our community
- Being a strong advocate against proposed amendments to the Racial Discrimination Act by the Australian Government
- Offering support to the Australian and Victorian Governments for the settlement of Syrian and Iraqi refugees in Australia and Victoria

### **CONCLUSION**

The Biloela community have made clear their strong desire for the Muruguppan family to be returned, and should be supported in this aim by communities around Australia. This is especially relevant to Monash, which is itself such a diverse, multicultural community and a champion of multiculturalism.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/national/government-plans-to-resettle-biloela-asylum-seekers-in-us-or-new-zealand-20210608-p57z7u.html>