

ENGAGEMENT WITH MULTICULTURAL DEPARTMENT

# Positive meeting for NCJWA

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THE Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) Multicultural Community Engagement Conference went ahead earlier this month with no Jewish representation, but National Council of Jewish Women of Australia (NCJWA) president Lynda Ben-Menashe told *The AJN* she had a productive meeting with the DCJ leadership as a result.

Ben-Menashe said NCJWA initially decided to attend the multicultural conference with “some trepidation”, and it turned out that they were the only Jewish organisation who registered.

According to the DCJ website, the conference aims to bring together a diverse group of individuals and organisations, “united by a common vision: to build safe, just, inclusive and resilient communities for all.”

Shortly before the conference was scheduled to take place, NCJWA made the tough decision not to attend as the DCJ decided to platform a high-profile individual who calls himself a “sport and human rights advocate”, but has remained almost entirely silent when Israelis or Australian Jews are the victims. NCJWA posted on social media: “The DCJ’s inclusion and celebration of such a person means NCJWA can only feel excluded and, frankly, unsafe



Lynda Ben-Menashe.

Photo: Annette Cohen

at their conference. We look forward to attending next year when sounder protocols are hopefully in place.”

Ben-Menashe said it was “deeply disappointing” that at this time, when racism against Jewish Australians is higher than at any time in history, there was no Jewish representation on the speaker panels.

“It was even more disappointing that little research had been done into other speakers, whose views expressed over the past 18 months have contributed more to division than to building cohesion, the supposed aim of the conference,” she said.

“However, it was very gratifying that when we raised these concerns with the DCJ we were taken

seriously and invited to engage with their leadership.

“When issues arise from a lack of care and not from ill will there is always room for positive change – which itself requires engagement. We look forward to seeing a more considered approach in future from this and other statutory bodies charged with multicultural affairs.”

Ben-Menashe said it’s been difficult for many Jewish people to engage with the wider community over the past 18 months “as we’ve cycled through states of shock, pain, sadness and deep trauma”.

“But engagement is always important,” she said.

“Because Australia is our home and most Jewish Australians will continue to live here.”