



COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND SERVICES COMMITTEE

Members present:

Ms CP McMillan MP—Chair

Mr SA Bennett MP

Ms CL Lui MP

Dr MA Robinson MP

Mr RCJ Skelton MP

Staff present:

Ms L Pretty—Committee Secretary

PUBLIC FORUM—INQUIRY INTO THE PATH TO TREATY BILL 2023

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Thursday, 23 March 2023

Longreach

THURSDAY, 23 MARCH 2023

The committee met at 12.06 pm.

CHAIR: Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you very much for having us in Longreach. Uncle Tony is going to officially welcome us to country.

Uncle Tony Weldon then gave a welcome to country.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Weldon. It is really good to be here with you on your country. It means a lot to the committee to have you welcome us.

I declare open this public forum for the committee's inquiry into the Path to Treaty Bill 2023. I too would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet this afternoon and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. We are very lucky to live in a country with the oldest living cultures anywhere in world in our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, whose lands, winds and waters we are so lucky to share.

I acknowledge Cynthia Lui, the member for Cook, sitting beside me. She is the first Torres Strait Islander to be elected to any Australian parliament. It is great to have Cynthia on our committee, particularly during consideration of the very important Path to Treaty Bill. We are also very lucky to have the Hon. Leeanne Enoch MP, the member for Algeester, on the government team as well as Mr Lance McCallum, the member for Bundamba. Both are proud First Nations peoples. I acknowledge them and their leadership.

My name is Corrine McMillan. I am the member for Mansfield and chair of committee. Mansfield is in Mount Gravatt, south of the city of Brisbane. I also have with me Mr Stephen Bennett, the member for Burnett and deputy chair of the committee. I have already introduced Cynthia. I also have with me Dr Mark Robinson, the member for Oodgeroo, and Mr Robert Skeleton, the member for Nicklin. Sadly, the member for Maiwar, Mr Michael Berkman, is unable to be with us today.

The purpose of this forum is to assist the committee with its consideration of the Path to Treaty Bill 2023. The Path to Treaty is a negotiation process with the Queensland government, Queensland's First Nations peoples and non-Indigenous Queenslanders. It may also be a negotiation that happens between First Nations clans and between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clans and mobs throughout Queensland.

The bill is quite simple. It proposes two very important steps. One is to establish the First Nations Treaty Institute, which will help support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to develop and provide a framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to prepare for and then commence treaty negotiations with the Queensland government. The second part of the bill is that it provides and recommends the Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry look into and report on the effects of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. That last step articulated in the bill is an important step because as a government we believe that over 235 years of colonisation has had a terrible impact on our First Nations people. That impact has resulted in transgenerational poverty and transgenerational trauma that has severely impacted the progress of First Nation peoples. You do not need me to tell you that.

Ultimately, that 235 years of colonisation has oppressed our First Nations peoples. Not many—in fact very few—non-Indigenous Queenslanders understand this. The more I move around my community and move around Queensland, the more I realise that few people understand the impact of colonisation, through no fault of their own in many cases. In many cases the curriculum has never told the whole story. The curriculum in our schools over 235 years has told one side of the story. What we have is a Queensland that in many ways is quite ignorant to what happened over that time. As a government we believe that the Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry is an important step to making sure that we take our Queensland community with us and that we begin to have a shared understanding of our true history. When we do that, we are able to move forward together.

We must understand our past before we can prepare for a united Queensland, for a Queensland that is supportive and for a Queensland that is understanding, empathetic and compassionate. Ultimately, that is what we all want for our Queensland community—a Queensland community that is compassionate, that is understanding, that is not ignorant and that is empathetic. We believe that when that happens we will be able to move forward together.

This afternoon's meeting is about you providing some feedback to the committee on the bill. I need to mention that the meeting is a meeting of the Queensland parliament and will be run under the rules of the Queensland parliament. That means that we will, of course, be respectful of each other. The meeting will be recorded by Hansard—thank you, Bonnie. You may be filmed or photographed during this afternoon's session. If you have any concerns about that please talk to the secretariat, Lynda, and she will be able to support you. Media may also be present this afternoon. They will be under my direction as chair at all times, which is the rules of parliament. I ask that we turn mobile phones off or to silent mode to ensure a respectful afternoon.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have until about two o'clock together. It is important that we share our views as individuals and as a collective. Your views will be captured in the committee's report back to the parliament prior to the bill being debated. We plan to debate the bill in Cairns. We are taking the whole of the parliament to Cairns in May. We believe it is pertinent to be in a community with a very large population of First Nations people to debate the bill. We will debate the bill in Cairns between 9 and 11 May. The committee's time lines are quite tight.

The First Nations Treaty Institute, which will support the treaty negotiation processes, as well as the Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry will be working for the next three to five years and continue the consultation with local communities throughout Queensland. I might leave it there and hand over to the first brave person who would like to make a comment or provide feedback about the bill.

DEMPSEY, Mr Lionel, Private capacity

Mr Dempsey: I would like to know: is this about Queensland? Is this a treaty about Queensland? Is it to recognise the Aboriginal people? The problem with that is you cannot have a treaty in a place they call Queensland or any place that is called anything because we have stories that travel way back. I actually look after them. I know there is 'no border land' and these stories go back there. What I say is a part of those people.

CHAIR: Are you talking about the Northern Territory border?

Mr Dempsey: Yes, any border—Northern Territory, Western Australia, South Australia.

CHAIR: That is a really important question and comment. To think that our First Nations peoples got to the border and thought, 'We can't cross the border, we're Queenslanders,' is ridiculous, of course. One of the things that is both a hindrance and a support is the fact that the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the Voice to Parliament are being presented in the Australian parliament as we speak, so the two processes will run concurrently. We know that the Northern Territory, South Australia and Victoria have already begun their processes around a path to treaty for their states. What we will find, particularly as the Australian government continues their work around the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the Voice, is that many states in Australia will begin the path to treaty process. Essentially, the Path to Treaty or the treaty negotiation is between First Nations peoples and the Queensland government, but there is nothing stopping you as you develop the treaty to incorporate other significant parts.

Mr Dempsey: Yes, ignore the borders.

CHAIR: I think that is a really valid point you make.

Mr Dempsey: Then you would not have to ignore the different—

CHAIR: That is right. It is a very good point. The further we move west—so places like Mount Isa have a very significant First Nations population who are originally from the territory.

Mr Dempsey: Yes. I am from this side of Queensland but the stories there are from over there. They are not from what you call Queensland. The problem is that, because of that border, they have left people out there who we are supposed to support and those people had the right but they were telling them they are not allowed back out to this river, but that is not part of their country because there is a fence. That fence was not there. They need to come back to their river instead of living and perishing in the desert. That is just one thing.

CHAIR: That is a very good point.

WILLIAMS, Mr Michael, Longreach Leader

Mr Williams: I want to put on the record that peoples who are on Aboriginal land and cross borders between the Northern Territory et cetera will be recognised and will benefit from a Queensland treaty.

CHAIR: First Nations clans may come together to make a number of plans to treaty. The Northern Territory has begun the process of developing a treaty. Not all states in Australia have as yet, but I would expect that most of them will. The treaty that you and your clans develop is up to you. If the issue of the border and collectively shared pieces of geography and stories are part of your story, then that should not be excluded.

Mr Dempsey: I cannot use those fences or borders as someone's country when it is not. They have taken country from all the people that way and stuck it into the Queensland side and they gave it to someone else. They have done it everywhere. You cannot do that. It has caused a lot of misery.

CHAIR: That will be part of the Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry as well. Those processes, the rules, the policies and the laws that have been made over 235 years in Queensland have impacted First Nations communities and those stories need to be told. One of the great things about the last few days as the committee has been travelling and talking to communities is that we have all learned so much. My background is that I am a former teacher and a school principal and I always thought that I was relatively informed about the history of our state in terms of our people, but this week I have learned so much. It is important that all Queenslanders—non-Indigenous and Indigenous—learn these stories because in many cases they have never been told. Shall we move on? Does someone else have something to contribute?

CHAMPION, Ms Rosemary, Private capacity

Ms Champion: I am at Longway Station at Longreach. I am wondering with this gathering, a lot of us probably—I am speaking for myself, I suppose—would not have had time to read the bill. Would it be advantageous to the group if you precis the bill as you see it, or do we have to interpret—are you looking for support for the bill? For people who have just wandered in off the street, could you encapsulate what the bill might be in your words rather than us trying to do some speed reading here today? Are you asking us to comment on the bill?

CHAIR: We have some information sheets here. I might get Lynda or Bonnie to hand out some sheets. They are just one page that captures the essence of the bill. As I mentioned, the bill is in two parts. One is that the Queensland government establish a First Nations institute that will manage and support First Nations Queenslanders to develop the treaty with the Queensland government. The second thing is that we establish a Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry that will run for around three years.

That is an opportunity to capture the stories of our First Nations peoples. That will be a tremendously difficult process for many of our people. As those non-Indigenous people understand and know, Australia has a shameful past—an absolutely shameful past. It has resulted in terrible impacts and oppression of our First Nations peoples.

They are really the two parts of the bill. The bill goes into detail around who will make up the institute, who will sit on the institute—how many non-Indigenous people, how many First Nations people, how many Aboriginal people, how many Torres Strait Islanders. It talks about how long the tenure of the board or of the institute is, what their role will be et cetera. That sits separate to government so that First Nations communities can work with the institute in a trusting relationship.

Mr BENNETT: Can I add two things? The other thing is that this is a bipartisan committee. I think it is important to say that the government has put a significant amount of money into a seeding fund, if you like—\$300 million—which will generate a revenue to make sure that the process continues a funding source for the institute to do its work. I think that is a significant issue.

For us all, this is about finally putting into legislation a pathway to treaty process. It may seem cumbersome—it may seem all those things—but it is an acknowledgement that this is the start of a process that is going to be significant. For me, it is about the fact that you cannot walk away from it—no more talkfests. It is actually in legislation that this is going to set a framework for pathway to treaty negotiations that the chair has described. There are a few elements to it but this is very much a preliminary step, an important step as Queensland goes forward. The institute and the pathway to treaty inquiry are basically what this bill is talking about implementing in as early as May this year. I hope that helps.

Ms Champion: The people who serve on the institute would be elected by—

Mr BENNETT: It is separate to government, as the chair has said, and that is a very important thing. The less government has to do with this and the more First Nations people control the agenda—that is what it should be about. In terms of who those representatives are, ultimately the minister will have some oversight of the selection, but it will have to come from community. Have you been involved with the work since 2019, or has anyone had—there has already been a committee running around. They have put out three or four different drafts now or interim reports. Mick Gooda, Aaron Fa'Aoso—I do not know them all, but they have been doing a mountain of work to get us ready. They have pretty much drafted this bill. This bill allows for the selection of 10 members to be on that institute committee. That will not be government and it should not be government. It has to be community led; otherwise, it does not mean anything at the end of the day. I hope that helps, Chair.

CHAIR: Thank you, Deputy Chair. Great work.

ARLIDGE, Mr Alan, Private capacity

Mr Arlidge: I spent 20-odd years out around Urandangi. If it passes, it won't do good, because the people on communities get nothing. There is \$4 billion a year, and if 10 or 11 people in Australia won all that money, or Aboriginal and Islander people, it is not going out where it is needed. They want me to go over to Bonya community, just over the border past Urandangi—my daughter's mother, at (indistinct) homestead years ago. They want me to go back and run that for my daughter. The community are getting ripped off. For example, when the council took over, small communities missed out. It went to the main ones. If it passes, I reckon there is going to be an inquiry of where those billions of dollars are going. I am talking billions. It is not small stuff; it is billions. I spent years out in the hard country and it is all the people on the coast and that is why people in the bush get upset. I say to people, 'Have you ever been out in the bush?' 'No.' 'Eaten a groundnut? What are you talking about then?' Go out and have a look and then you will see. People ask me to write a book. I say no. It is hard.

CHAIR: They are exactly the stories that need to be told.

Mr Arlidge: Well, go out—Urandangi years ago. Johnny passed away—got the schooling from the education department and he has passed away. His son has gone into town, living in town. Go and have a look at the community. I just about cried. I have seen some government people come out there, and in the morning they gave all the kids clean clothes—and then you see some walk around drunk. Just a minute, come out and see.

I got my stepdaughter to (indistinct). They reckon the water is bad. Well, get a hold of the experts to come out and test the water, drill a hole. It is the same with the CDP schemes. If it rains, no tucker. They have got water, get a grant to grow vegetables. Most of them eat goannas, kangaroos and emus. I have eaten all that stuff cooked in the ground. The young people these days are totally different, once they hit town. It is like Alice Springs and Mount Isa. I have seen it all. I have had a few battle scars on me, injured and all sorts, but what gets me upset is people as white as me, I am half-caste—I am half Irish and half Scot. It does not matter where you come from, speak up. If you do not, you are nothing; they are all over you. I have seen things. Some of these communities, they have the big V8 tyres and that, but there are the poor people who need it. I have seen them in the territory drive down. You see a big cloud of smoke, busted tyres on rims, no windscreen—all into Urandangi. That is what I am saying. Go out and have a look.

It is the only way because that is when the trouble starts. I have seen stuff. People need it. If it does pass, it will not—because the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. I have busted my guts all my life. I brought two kids up. My daughter would not come today. There are plenty out there. Just get off, have a go. I was brought up, more than six hours sleep, you are a tired bugger, and if you are not sweating you are bludging. As I said, it is different these days.

CHAIR: Thank you for your contribution. It was worthwhile. We know that the further west and north we go and the more remote, the more difficult life is. It is really important that you raise those issues.

Mr Dempsey: What he is talking about is actually in Queensland, not in the Northern Territory.

CHAIR: Yes, I understand.

Mr Dempsey: Right on that border, where he is talking about, is where his daughters and that live. That is where they put the communities on the other side of that border, instead of on the river, where they (indistinct). That is exactly what he is saying.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. Does anyone else have a contribution?

THOMPSON, Ms Kerry, Private capacity

Ms Thompson: My name is Kerry Thompson. My mob is Bidjara Curra Curra and I live in Barcaldine. I am a traditional custodian of Iningai country and a respected elder.

CHAIR: Aunty, have you come in from Barcaldine today?

Ms Thompson: Yes.

CHAIR: Thank you for coming in.

Ms Thompson: I want to ask a question about treaties. Are there any treaties already established across the nation? If so, are they successful?

CHAIR: That is a really good question. There are treaties in place in countries like New Zealand and Canada. To my knowledge, there are not any formal treaties yet in Australia. However, we have been made aware, as we have been moving through Queensland, that there are a couple of clans that are getting very close to establishing treaties with each other and are almost ready to establish one with the Queensland government. They are very clear about what they want. They are very clear about what their issues are. They are very clear about the concerns they have with government. They are very clear about what they require in order to ensure some economic sustainability for their clans. We are seeing some really advanced work with some clans in some parts of Queensland. That is the role of the institute. They will work with you and your groups to establish what you want and put together a treaty for negotiation with government.

Ms Thompson: If this treaty is successful and the Voice is successful, how will they work hand in hand?

CHAIR: Has everybody read the Uluru Statement from the Heart? If you have not read the Uluru Statement from the Heart, you should google it. It is a very beautiful piece of writing and it is very clear what it is about. The Uluru Statement from the Heart and the Voice referendum will run concurrently, side by side, with our treaty process. Regardless of what happens federally, the Queensland government is committed to making treaties with our First Nations peoples. We are hoping that the two will be complementary and will run side by side.

The deputy chair and I were researching yesterday, and we note that in 2009 and 2011 the Bligh government established a Constitution which included our First Nations peoples in our Queensland Constitution. The Path to Treaty will capitalise and improve and be another step further. The other thing is that we have three members of the Queensland government who are First Nations peoples. Not only is there a Constitution with the Queensland government but there is representation on the government. The treaty process and the healing inquiry will further progress relationships that are long overdue. I hope that answers your question.

WHYMAN, Dr Tia, Private capacity

Dr Whyman: I have a question that follows on from Kerry's. When I was reading the bill, it was not quite clear if there was going to be a treaty with each language group or native title group or if there was going to be an overarching one for the whole state of Queensland. Could you let us know?

CHAIR: There will not be an overarching one. We have 500 different language groups here in Queensland. It may be that Victoria may have one large one. They only have four language groups; we have 500. We have hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of clans, groups, displaced peoples across Queensland so it would not meet the needs of individual clans if there was one overarching one. I guess in some ways the bill is the overarching legislation and then the treaties will happen to meet each clan's needs.

Mr BENNETT: If I can give one thing to the group today, please do not make it about government setting the rules again. This has to come from the community. The community will determine how many treaties are in this state. It should never be government. As the chair said, there are 150 traditional owner groups and then there may be four or five families within that group that may want to talk about their own individual things. It is like 'how long is a piece of string?' That will come from the community and I think that is an important part of this. That is why the institute is separate to government as they go around and do their work.

It is an unfortunate legacy we have that it has always been government telling everyone what to do. If we can turn that around a bit and remember that this process the government is setting up is about traditional owners and First Nations people taking back and being in control about what a treaty should look like, it will contain what you want it to contain. Then you negotiate with government about how that looks. I see what you are saying. We get that question a lot about how many there will be. It will not be us telling the communities how many there should be. We want First Nations people to drive it, otherwise it will not work.

Dr Whyman: Maybe that needs to be clear in the bill.

Mr BENNETT: Remember that we are setting up the institute for that work to continue—for them to go out and start to talk with First Nations people about the treaty and to get those communities ready for that negotiation, understand the ramifications. It will be meat on the bone type stuff. That is when those things will progress.

CHAIR: I think that is a good point. The deputy chair and I and the committee will look at that recommendation that we make it clear in the bill that it is not one overarching treaty. As the deputy chair says, it will meet the needs of each clan or groups of clans. There may be groups of clans that come together in one geographical area who are really clear about what they want and who want to work together. Are there any further questions?

CARTER, Mr Dan, Private capacity

Mr Carter: I work at the Central West Hospital and Health Service. My question follows on from the engagement and traditional owner treaties negotiated between two parties or potentially more but between parties. Other states have followed the rule of really engaging directly with traditional owner groups or native title registered parties. What about regions like Iningai country that do not have traditional owner or native title registered parties? How do the communities out here ensure they are still involved in the same process? I know that it is really up to the treaty institute to fill in those gaps, but what are the thoughts around that? I am sure there would be other areas around the state as well.

CHAIR: Deputy Chair, do you want to say a few things and then I am happy to continue.

Mr BENNETT: I guess it is a hypothetical, but we are really relying on the traditional owners and the First Nations people to select representatives for the institute to do its work. I have no doubt that 10 people will not be able to do the work (inaudible). I guess it is about how we make sure, and the government has already made a commitment to the funding source to allow, that engagement to continue. We would hope that for everyone in this state it would have to be really significant, because not many people are aware of the details so we have a lot of work to do and the institute has a lot of work to do in making sure that the First Nations reach those negotiations, and who is negotiating and who is not. I guess it is a hypothetical as to how that works.

I have real faith in the interim committee's work that has already demonstrated their capacity to get out and really put in a mountain of work. It is all on the website, what they have done. It is going to be an education process and it is going to be an engagement process. I hope, as you alluded to, that those people get their say because it has to be the people on the ground who drive this. Does that make sense? Somewhere along the line someone is going to put their hand up and say, 'Come up and talk to us.' That is what we hope is the way the institute will do their work.

CHAIR: Dan, the institute will be staffed sufficiently so that they will provide the resources to be able to support groups and clans to develop their treaty in preparation for the negotiation.

BUSHNELL, Ms Rebecca, Private capacity

Ms Bushnell: Will the institute be staffed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples or are they just in the background? Is it a top-down approach or bottom-up?

CHAIR: I imagine, as the bill outlines, predominantly the large majority of members of the institute's governing body will be First Nations peoples, as is the interim treaty body at the moment. Forgive me if I am wrong, Deputy Chair, but there are eight First Nations peoples and six non-Indigenous?

Mr BENNETT: Yes. Again, that will be made up and the minister will help in that process. It is about qualifications; it is about capacity; it is about geographical locations. The bill does set out a framework and I guess that is what we will be guided by, remembering that it is in legislation. That is going to be an important way forward. Remember, it is not government. This has to be First Nations people. Less is best for government in this—or in anything, to be fair.

CHAIR: To answer your question, it is expected that First Nations people will be working with First Nations people.

Mr BENNETT: If I could find the section that has been put into the bill, I will try to show it to you before the end of the meeting; is that okay? The criteria is entrenched in the bill. I do not have a copy of the bill with me but I will try to find it before the end of the meeting, if that helps?

Ms Bushnell: I just thought, under the power of self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, that now would be the time to make the whole institute Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and not a proportion of non-Indigenous.

Mr BENNETT: It says eight members, two co-chairs and all be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders to reflect the diversity of Queensland First Nations people, gender balanced, co-chaired by a woman and a man who are selected for the inaugural council. That is the best I can do on short notice; is that okay?

CHAIR: The committee was working in Townsville yesterday and the Townsville community was very clear about the United Nations human rights for Aboriginal people. We will include a chapter in our report around the human rights principles and one of them is self-determination. We would expect that those principles will be followed and will be reflected in the establishment of the institute. It does not make sense to have non-Indigenous people doing First Nations people's business.

Ms Bushnell: I think if it is going to be a ratio then the non-Indigenous people really have to be guided, because Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do not need qualifications to tell you what is going on and what is not right. They do not need qualifications. If non-Indigenous people are going to be a proportion because we need qualifications in the institute then they need to be guided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders—as a guidance.

CHAIR: Absolutely. The other thing that I will say is that there are a number of non-Indigenous people on the interim treaty body at the moment. One of the benefits of that has been to help share the understanding across non-Indigenous Queenslanders as they do their work. One of the things that our committee recognises is that it is not necessarily Indigenous people to whom we need to sell this bill. Our First Nations communities have been asking for this for 235 years. Actually, the important part is taking our non-Indigenous Queensland community with us so that our First Nations communities do not continue to experience exclusion, oppression and racism. One of the non-Indigenous members on the interim treaty board is the former lord mayor of Brisbane, Sallyanne Atkinson. She is very committed to First Nations causes but is non-Indigenous.

Mr BENNETT: As a non-Indigenous person myself, I will repeat the words said by someone in Townsville yesterday which made it very clear to me what may happen. As the chair said, if non-Indigenous people are not taken on this journey then the risk is that we will hear, 'What do they want now? What's going on now? How much money is this going to cost us?' It should not be about that; it should be about us coming together. That was somebody's analysis yesterday. I guess for a long time First Nations have lived with that cynicism and racism and so on. I thought that is why non-Indigenous Australians need to be committed to this process as well. It is incredibly important.

CHAIR: Deputy Chair, the member for Cook has a few words to say.

Ms LUI: In regards to what you just said, Ms Bushnell, I think much of the conversation yesterday in Townsville and also on Palm Island was around how important it is to engage non-Indigenous people with us on this journey. Path to Treaty really is about building or reframing the

relationship and strengthening the relationship with First Nations people and government, but also I feel it is reframing the relationship with Queensland as a society as a whole. I think it is really important that when we have these conversations we have not only the broad view of the whole of Queensland and all Queenslanders; I am hoping that this will be a journey that we all get to own.

I think what government is trying to achieve here is that, through this whole Path to Treaty process, eventually we can reunite our histories so that Queensland history becomes a shared history, non-Indigenous and Indigenous. From the feedback from Palm Island and again in Townsville, they expressed very strongly about having both views so that we all get to own this and it is not just Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders pushing for this, which then becomes a process that is one-sided and not for everyone.

Thank you. I appreciate your view today. I think certainly it is going to be tough and it is going to be challenging, particularly when the Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry begins. I want this to be a journey where we can all feel safe to express our views. First Nations people, for a long time, have always wanted to tell our truth and this is the time that we all get to tell our truth. It will be a journey of not only educating the wider community but also creating awareness and bringing everyone along with us.

Ms Bushnell: Can I just add that anything I say is not representing CQID, who I work for.

CHAIR: No problem. The other thing that I will say as a non-Indigenous person is that what we have heard from a number of non-Indigenous people in the past few days is that there is a feeling somewhat that it may also set non-Indigenous peoples free of a whole range of things: guilt, lack of understanding, ignorance, shame, embarrassment, prejudice. That issue has come up in the last few days. Along with the learnings and how difficult it will be, there is tremendous opportunity there to broaden the perspectives of non-Indigenous people.

Ms Bushnell: Will this bill ultimately be about self-governance? I am getting confused. Is it healing? Is it ideally long-term about self-governance in Queensland? Will other states join in? As Lionel said, how can this just work in Queensland when a Dreamtime goes to wherever it goes and there is no boundary? Will other states get on board to make it a unified healing process for Australia, do you think?

CHAIR: I cannot speak on behalf of other state governments, but we know that a number of state governments have begun the journey of a path to treaty with their First Nations communities. Those states share border communities with other states. Victoria, Northern Territory and South Australia have begun a treaty process. We are a little further down the track than them. They do not yet have their bill ready to go. The answer is that I believe that more and more states will establish a path to treaty.

Ms LUI: To add to that, I think the whole idea of having public hearings around the intent of this bill is to gather information from the communities right across Queensland. When you talk about governance, I guess, we are here to listen and get your feedback about what you would like or how you would see Path to Treaty working for communities. Our role here is to collate all this information, put it into a report and then present it to parliament. Then the bill gets passed as legislation. Our job is to gain information to establish the treaty institute and lead the truth and healing inquiry. All the information that you give to us through this process will then help us to make recommendations. If it is governance, how do you anticipate this would work with the negotiation process? There have been a lot of good questions asked here this morning. I am also keen to hear how you think it should work for First Nations communities, First Nations clans, whether it is intrastate as well. It is quite complex.

Ms Bushnell: Then I think we have missed a step. Where is community? One, two, three, four—there is not many community here. From my understanding there was not much notice given, so community actually could not come because community are out 200 kays away or 300 kays away so community actually could not come to this. My input is, I believe, null and void. Lionel? Yes. Community: where is community? Do we reschedule to get community in?

Mr Dempsey: Can you come back to when we have got people here?

Ms Bushnell: You had mob from Winton wanting to come, hey?

Mr Dempsey: Yes. Because you are not going to go out there to (indistinct) like I was talking about.

CHAIR: Yes. It is important also just to recognise that this is the very initial, first baby step in the process. Once we have legislation, then the real consultation and negotiation will happen with communities. Anyone is quite able to give us a ring, provide feedback, get on a video call, email us—whatever—but the big consultation will happen in the next three to five years as treaties are Longreach

negotiated. This is really about getting our leaders from different communities in Queensland together to say, 'What do you reckon about this bill? Do we have it right? Are you happy with it? How can we improve it? What stands out to you as good? What needs to be improved?'

Mr Dempsey: What about all the mines destroying country? In three years there will be nothing left. What about that? Is this going to do anything before then?

CHAIR: A number of First Nations communities have raised mining with us and the impact of mining on their country.

Mr Dempsey: There won't be no country to go to, yeah.

CHAIR: I would imagine that for many clans across Queensland that issue will be part of the treaty that they establish with the government.

Mr Dempsey: Those claims that were put through—they went right along the border, like square and all this down fence lines. Would we be able to undo that?

CHAIR: I am not in a position to determine that, but they are the sorts of issues that would need to be negotiated and put in your treaty.

Mr Dempsey: I talk to a lot of old people back there who could not come here, but I want to tell them this.

CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Dempsey: Is that a part of it?

CHAIR: That is exactly the sort of thing that needs to be negotiated as part of your treaty with the government and with other clans.

Mr Dempsey: One of the blokes, Sainy, his daughter is living out there in a desert with nothing when they actually should be over the so-called Queensland side on the big banks of the big river there where the real country is, but because there is a fence—this is what he is talking about, too—that is the problem with it all.

CHAIR: Yes, a really good point. Were there any other comments, concerns?

BIRSE, Ms Kate, Private capacity

Ms Birse: My name is Kate Birse. I understand that the bill is about setting up the institute and the inquiry. Where do you think the tangible results for people will come from out of the inquiry? Is it a hope that it will change education and improve health services? I understand this is about history, but there have to be positives moving forward. I am just not clear on where you think that direction might be.

CHAIR: I will hand to Cynthia to comment and then any other members of the committee.

Ms LUI: That is a really good question. We had discussions in Townsville yesterday around all the social issues that First Nations people in communities currently face and all the challenges with addressing social outcomes for First Nations communities. Up until this point, government has been working directly with communities around setting up a framework. Recently we announced a First Nations employment and training strategy. Two years ago we passed through parliament the first ever legislation acknowledging traditional owner adoption—that is more for the Torres Strait. We have passed that legislation into Queensland law to recognise this traditional practice because in the past it was disadvantaging Torres Strait Islanders obtaining identification, so on and so forth, as well as other implications.

There are mechanisms in place through this whole treaty process, but I think prior to getting to that point we also need to understand the impact of colonisation through different policies that happened over many generations to this point in time and where we are still talking about closing the gap and how we address social outcomes or improve social outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I imagine that will be addressed through this process, in setting up the institute, having negotiations, and strengthening and reframing the relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. There has been a lot of work also happening in this space about local decision-making, and I imagine that by strengthening that process through this bill there will be greater or broader conversation between communities and government. Another example is that we are also reviewing our Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act.

All of that will go into strengthening legislation right across the board in government. We want to address employment and training. We want to address greater business and economic opportunities for people, and it will all come into the framework that we set aside. We need to get through this part and unite our histories so that we all work towards something greater for our future.

CHAIR: One of the other really practical examples whereby laws, policies and decisions were made in the past which severely impact our First Nations brothers is the example that these two brothers gave here earlier around a fence which limited access to the water and to the green pastures et cetera. That was a decision made by, I assume, government or landowners that severely impacted our brothers' families.

Mr Dempsey: That is an actual state fence.

CHAIR: Yes. There is a really strong, living example of rules, policies and laws in the past made by predominantly white Australia that have severely impacted our two brothers. We need to understand that in order to rectify it and not make those decisions again. That is a really prominent example here today.

Ms LUI: To add to that, Chair, for a long time the First Nations issues have always been that the government carries the brunt of it—and I can speak for it because I am First Nations myself—and I think for a long time it was always government trying to put mechanisms in place to address outcomes for First Nations people but not necessarily meeting the mark every step of the way. We talked about closing the gap for a very long time, and we are still talking about closing the gap. I feel that will happen through strengthening that relationship between First Nations communities and government and giving First Nations communities greater voice in the decision-making process.

I know that through our Local Thriving Communities, through DATSIP, there is a big body of work that is already happening to give voice back to the community. I know with regard to all the land transfers that government has handed land back to traditional owners. It is about empowering First Nations people to have more management or control over their own land and then plan for their future, because we have a strong connection to land and our seas. I think what government is doing in this space now is really trying to understand from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' perspective, from grassroots perspective, because in order for us to move forward we all need to move forward as one. The Premier has always outlined that. It is great that we have the opposition also supporting this bill because it is about all of us now. It is not just Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Your history becomes Queensland history and your issues become Queensland issues, so moving forward with whatever we are trying to achieve in this space is us doing it together.

Mr BENNETT: What we have heard from people—these are not my words, it is important to acknowledge, because it is not about me or the committee—is that it needs to be on an equal basis, a concept that we have never talked about before. It is about coming together to sign agreements in good faith about the future of particularly the First Nations group in negotiating a treaty. It has to meet social justice and has to have all those issues of improving the outcome for First Nations people because, whatever has happened to now, we have not got it right under a whole heap of governments over generations.

If this is going to be fair dinkum, it has to be done, as the chair said in her opening remarks, in good faith. That is why all Queenslanders need to be at the table as this goes forward. It has to be about social outcomes; it has to be about acknowledgement of the trauma and the other issues that have occurred over a long period of time. There are a whole heap of matters here that are foreign to us in our own psyche which we are trying to grapple with now about a new way of doing business with government. That is why being on this committee has been such a privilege, because we are hearing about what could be, and that should be something that Queensland should be proud of going forward. If you were negotiating treaty, would you not want health outcomes and schooling and education? That is a basic human right. That would be part of your negotiation. It might be social dividends from mining that you negotiate with the government that somehow give you a future fund to go forward. It could be a whole number of things.

As I said to you earlier, just remember that it needs to come from First Nations up, not governments somehow manipulating the process. If the traditional owners want a real education focus, make it No. 1 in your treaty negotiation. Do you understand what I am saying? Again, it has to be what the First Nations people want. That is what you should negotiate on, in good faith.

Also remember the trauma-based issues that the chair has talked about. I will not tell you how old I am, but I was reading on the plane about some of the things that happened just in my lifetime, some of it when I was five and 10 years old. As I started to read, I could not believe what was going on in this state. That is modern history; that is not 200 years ago. We have a lot of work to do to get past that and towards healing. We have a lot of work to do to make sure that these negotiations are in good faith. I think the commitment is there. I think this is historic, to be honest with you. I really do. Treaty has to be in the spirit of reflecting on the First Nations people who are negotiating it. Everyone is going to be different.

CHAIR: Thank you, Deputy Chair and member for Cook. That was really clear. Just to give you another example, thinking about my career prior to being elected, I spent 23 years as a teacher and a school leader in a number of different locations throughout Queensland. It would not surprise me, as a teacher and a school leader, that if I was to go into a community in remote Queensland as a principal in the future years, to walk into a school as the new principal and have the treaty handed to me that has been negotiated with government and in that treaty it says, 'Our First Nations community have made an agreement with the Queensland government that the children of this community will be taught this history.' If I project myself into principalship again in the future, which could happen, I would not be surprised to walk into a community as the new principal and be given a copy of treaty and for that treaty to outline what our First Nations community want their children taught about the history of that community. There is another example of a practical context that could be very real. As a public servant and a principal of a community, I think that is a very reasonable expectation of me. It should have been happening for 235 years. Instead, we have been talking about Captain Cook and 1788.

Mr SKELTON: I will just add to what the chair was saying about treaty negotiations, education and embedding culture in curriculum. Something else that came up was the preservation of language. A lot of First Nations languages are becoming extinct or are indeed extinct. Those languages that exist and those stories are important, and I imagine they should also be put into the treaty negotiations. I am very proud of some of the schools in my area that already do this, for the local Gubbi Gubbi people. I can see that happening in localities across Queensland and eventually Australia.

I just want to acknowledge the two gentlemen talking about the arbitrary boundaries that were set by pastoralists or governments in the past that have divided peoples. That is certainly something that has to go into the treaty: 'This is our people. This is where we used to gather. We didn't go over there; we are here.' There are a lot of things. This whole process—the board and the truth-telling inquiry are just a skeleton. It is up to everyone here to get the flesh on the bones, to flesh it all out. It does not matter if you are Indigenous or non-Indigenous, we all have a duty to do that. Like for

everyone, it has been a massive education for me. I am quite weary and emotionally drained from listening to stories and truths that I did not know existed. Treaties can have whatever they need to have in them. It is about self-determination. It is about having outcomes. That has to be part of it.

CHAIR: Do we have any other community members who would like to comment?

Mr Arlidge: If it gets passed, there will be a lot of trouble out in small places. Last year or the year before last around Cunnamulla two different tribes found some minerals. One said, 'This is my country.' The other bloke said, 'No, you're wrong country.' That is going to be the problem. I remember once quite a few years ago in the Northern Territory, on the community, the land council came from Alice Springs, picked up an Aboriginal woman and took her to a different community. She knew which tribe came from which area. I do not think there are much royalties here, but there are the tribes. I will not mention any names, but a few years ago there was one bloke. A little Aboriginal kid went to this bloke and said, 'You're not from here.' The bloke said, 'Poor little Aborigine kid. It's not your country.' That was about 40 years ago. That is going to be the problem. If Aboriginal people get the rights, 'Righto, we have the rights.' Like I said before, someone else will say, 'No, that's my country.' 'No, it's not.' The next minute a blue will start. There are so many tribes around. That is going to be a—

CHAIR: You raise a really important point, Alan. A number of different communities have raised similar sorts of issues. As the member for Cook said, it is not going to be an easy process. We do not pretend that it will be. What we do know is that those tasks, processes or problems that are the hardest in life often yield us the best reward and the best outcomes. Anything that is worthwhile in life is not easy. We do not pretend it is going to be easy. Negotiations may take quite a bit of argy-bargy.

Mr Arlidge: In the old days there was this old lady at Urandangi. On the banks of the river, the little kids would write in the sand and do different animals, but all that stuff is gone now. They taught their lingo. I could accept it. I am from the old school. I know nothing about this modern technology and this and that. I want to ask one question, please. I cannot understand it. How much blood has to be in you to be of Islander or Aboriginal descent? How much percentage? I am trying to find the answer to that question. Some have told me a few things. Some have said it is one-sixteenth blood. Some have said a quarter. If this thing comes in, you are either Aborigine on the set or you are a different thing. Personally, I am Pitta Pitta tribe from Lake Nash. My daughter is pretty fair but she is half-caste. If people dispute it, you have to say. If you are a sixteenth-caste Aborigine, that is wrong. That is rubbish. It will take years and years, but if this Aboriginal thing comes out, there has to be some saying that you are of Aboriginal or Islander descent.

CHAIR: Alan, I might turn to the member for Cook. My understanding is that we do not use that terminology anymore, but I will pass to the member for Cook—

Mr Arlidge: That is the idea. I am going back years ago.

CHAIR: I will turn to Cynthia, who will have a better knowledge of that than me.

Ms LUI: I do not know if it is better knowledge, Alan, but all I will say is that we come in all shades of black. I think if you are Aboriginal, you are Aboriginal; if you are Torres Strait, you are Torres Strait. That is all I am going to say on that.

Mr Arlidge: I was in New Zealand in the early sixties. The Maori had the moko, the tattoo on the shin they call it. There were three proper Maoris left alive then. The rest were mixed blood. If this thing comes out, to me personally you are an Aborigine person or an Islander person. You are not a quarter-caste or you are saying so. That is why a lot of European people are not understanding what race we are—all that stuff. That is why it is hard.

For years I would not speak or say boo. I have been around the world and all over the joint. I would fly into one country, get a motel room, sit there and keep quiet. It is only in the last 10 years that I have been speaking up. I help anyone out—black, white or brindle. There was an Aborigine bloke stuck for a week on the side of the road. I fixed him up and got his car going. When I went to the community, every fortnight there was money there—\$10. I would say, 'What's that for?' 'That old bloke you helped.' 'I don't want it.' 'No, you got to accept it.' I let it build up to Christmas to buy him a present.

That is the old days. Those days are gone now. That is why the kids are going to town. Some of the parents are on the drugs at parties. The kids are having kids. Go to school, fair enough. 'Where's Mum?' Not there. 'We'll get our mates. Joe Blow down the road, we'll rob his house. Bigger him.' Cameras up? We run away. It is all that stuff. You cannot slap them in the ear—not anymore.

Ms Thompson: Can I say something?

CHAIR: Sure.

Ms Thompson: I work with Queensland Health, with Daniel and Tia. For years I used to deliver the cultural practice to staff and that. One of the things that I find very difficult—it is not ignorance—is the lack of knowledge that people have about the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people—even me—because it was never taught. If we are going to come together, the non-Indigenous need to understand the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. There are some ignorant and arrogant people out there. How are we going to be able to do this so that they understand what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people went through, especially when we talk about the eras, the 1860s? I did not even know that I was not classified as a human being on the Census. I did not even know that until years later.

CHAIR: 1967; is that right?

Ms Thompson: Yes. Especially living out here, I have heard and been through it. People need to have an understanding of what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people went through if we are going to move forward, because they already have their opinion but how are we going to change that?

Ms LUI: I think I mentioned before that it is going to be a very challenging process for all of us. It is going to be very complex. Once we set up the treaty institute and when we lead the inquiry, we need to have strong, practical mechanisms in place that will support that process in not only getting our history out but also feeding it back into the community. I am not across any of those details, but I imagine that the people who will be responsible for doing that body of work will pull information this way and push information out that way.

When you talk about history, there are probably two parts to that. You have the non-Indigenous history that may be a bit ignorant and may lack some understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history. We want this to be an educational process for them. Then there are people like me. I do not know if it is the Torres Strait Islander culture, but my history was lost somewhere in translation. I question it now, because it was not something that we talked openly about, about what happened to my people. There were never stories passed down through to my generation. It is a learning process for me. I mentioned yesterday in Townsville that, while I am excited that I get to learn—it is a learning process for me—it is also very sad, because I do not know too much about my history. I think it is a learning for everyone in this space.

The member for Nicklin mentioned language. My tribe from back home lost our language three or four generations ago. I envy people who speak their language, because I cannot speak mine. I speak the common language from the Torres Strait, which is Torres Strait Creole. As for our native language, it has been and gone. It is part of my history now. I want to understand how it all came to be. I know that I will never pass it down to my children because I do not speak the language fluently. There is a lot of healing, there is a lot of learning and there is a lot of awareness that is going on and, like I said, it is for the non-Indigenous and Indigenous, and I am included in that as well.

Ms Thompson: The biggest thing I struggle with is that they need to get over it and move on. What do you say to those people?

CHAIR: There is a comment I want to make as a non-Indigenous person. One of the things that is most distressing for me around the loss of language is when I understand and know the reason for the loss of language. My understanding is that it was a deliberate intent by white people to disempower First Nations communities. Taking away their language disempowered communities and people and oppressed them. For me, that is the most distressing thing. Over time stories get lost. Over time we lose parts of our family history, whether it be our grandmother's ring or something else. For me the most distressing thing was that it was deliberately done by white Australia to oppress, marginalise and disempower our First Nations people. For me, that is the bit that is disgraceful.

Ms Thompson: We grew up with our grandmother more so, because our grandfather died at an early age, but we remember that. We were told that if they spoke their language they would be sent away.

Mr SKELTON: The loss of language has probably contributed to the loss of the story and the loss of the telling of stories. The loss of language contributed to those gaps in history. When you are talking about telling the story through elders, how does that happen if one does not understand the language the stories are told in? As the chair said, it is a very deliberate way of disconnecting people from their culture and it is a pretty shameful legacy that we have. It has to be faced up to.

I understand your concern about education. Some people do not want to be educated. You are right. It is hard. The media are putting out a lot of misinformation around this. I think we need to try hard to get this out through the media. There needs to be a big education campaign, utilising all the

state's resources like the State Library, archives from Trove and so on. As we already know, it is going to be challenging with the tyranny of distance and the lack technological knowledge or ability. I envisage that community radio stations will play a big role in this at some point because they have a lot more coverage than broadband or TV. They are things that the chair will put into the report as recommendations to take back to the government.

CHAIR: Are there any other comments from members or anyone who has not spoken?

LAZA-SAGIGI, Ms Alice, Private capacity

Ms Laza-Sagigi: The Torres Strait has not lost their language. They have lost their deep language, their native tongue, when their elders passed away but they have their natural language plus the Torres Strait Creole. With the kids from the islands moving down south, that is where they lost their culture and their languages. If you go back to the islands you find that they still hold their traditional things every day. Even their language is very strong.

Ms LUI: On my island, Yam Island, we do not speak our language. In the western, top western and eastern they speak theirs. On my island they certainly do not. The Kulkalgal central group of islands are working with each other because we speak similar dialects. We are trying to work with all the other Kulkalgal nations to revitalise our language. For me and my family, we have lost that three or four generations ago. I do not speak it. I have been deprived of my language. I will never be able to pass it on to my children.

Ms Laza-Sagigi: I know both languages from Saibai and Badu. That is where my grandparents came from. With Saibai that is (indistinct) and Badu that is (indistinct) for my grandfather. That is Sagigi Island. There is another question I was going to ask. Do you guys have any records of who the TOs are for each island and anywhere around here? Are there any names or anything?

Mr BENNETT: I think DATSIP, the department, has tried to identify 150 registered TOs. As I said before, within those traditional owner groups there are going to be a heap of other different interest groups—that is a terrible way of describing it. There will be other families and other people who need to be involved.

Ms Laza-Sagigi: Yes, the TO for Badu is Sagigi and the Nonas are just the custodians. They are just blood brothers. They were made blood brothers.

Mr BENNETT: As the chair alluded to at the beginning, they are the things that will be worked out between the traditional people themselves. It has to be; otherwise, it will not work. It is the way it is going to have to be. It has to be driven by First Nations people. The less involvement we have in it the better.

Ms Laza-Sagigi: Have you guys touched base with the TOs for all the places you travelled to?

Ms LUI: Through the PBCs we were on TI the other day and we heard from the local native title organisation up there. They have membership that has traditional owners right across the Torres Strait. We also heard from another elder in the community who was not really part of that organisation. They wanted this process to be fair and they want us to not work directly with prescribed corporations but work with individual groups. I think that is the intent of this. Once the institute gets set up, that is when traditional owner groups can come forward, whether you are part of an entity or whether you are a group in your own right, to have these conversations around negotiating treaties.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for your comments, Alice. Is there anyone else who has not spoken who would like to contribute or provide feedback?

Ms Bushnell: Are we going to go through the issues for consideration and down that list? Is that not what we are doing?

CHAIR: They were just some ideas—

Ms Bushnell: I thought we were going to run through them.

CHAIR: They were just some thoughts or ideas to get you thinking.

Dr Whyman: My question is about the time lines that you mentioned earlier. If for some reason there are groups that are unable to undergo a treaty process or develop a treaty within the time frame, how set is that time frame? Is there leeway in that time frame?

CHAIR: My understanding—and I will pass to either the deputy chair or Cynthia, the member for Cook, to follow on from me—is that the only time lines that have been set have been for the Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry. That is about three years, give or take. The reason for that is that there needs to be some closure. We cannot go on and traumatise our First Nations communities for years and years around that inquiry. We need to find the information, tell the story, begin the education process of all Queenslanders and then move on for everyone's health and wellbeing. In terms of the treaty process, I understand they are not bookended. I understand that the treaty negotiations could go on for however long is needed. I will pass to Cynthia or Steve to comment.

Mr BENNETT: In the fact sheets we have given it is clearly articulated that they believe it will be three to five years at a minimum before most of these things will be ready to be negotiated in good faith. There is a lot of work to be done, as we have tried to point out today. The institute and how they

will work is still a bit of an unknown. Hats off to them, with the mountain of work they are going to have to do. As Alice said, there are so many people who should be involved in this. The Path to Treaty Bill talks about five years to get together and get people educated and prepared to be able to negotiate in good faith.

Dr Whyman: So they do not have to have a treaty by the end of the fifth year?

Mr BENNETT: No.

Dr Whyman: That is just the process to get them to there.

Mr BENNETT: That would be government dictating the process again and that is not what it should be. When people are ready they should be able to negotiate, and if they are not we need to let that happen.

CHAIR: Thanks for your question. Were there any other comments, concerns, feedback from those who have not spoken?

Ms Thompson: Does there need to be a treaty to put Indigenous language into schools?

CHAIR: The example I used was just an example that came to mind. The question was: does there need to be a treaty to put learning language into schools? I do not really know the answer to that. The way schools have been structured for at least the past 10 to 15 years is that principals have the power, the autonomy and the authority to lead their school communities in consultation with their community. I understand that that opportunity is available now should communities want to have any aspect included in education. There is opportunity through P&Cs to negotiate that with the principal. I do not believe that a treaty is necessary, but it may be something that First Nations communities might want to include in their treaty.

I guess it is a bit like the bill that we have. Enshrining this bill in legislation gives it some sort of continuity and confirmation and certainty. I would imagine that First Nations communities would want the same content in their treaties that would provide them with continuity, confirmation, commitment and know that this is almost a piece of local legislation. Do you want to add to that, Cynthia?

Ms LUI: I think you covered it.

Mr Dempsey: If this is going to take five years, what if another government—One Nation or someone—get in and they do not want that? What if One Nation gets in? They will just rip this up and chuck it away and walk on it if you do not do it.

CHAIR: We have had a number of people ask this question over this week. My response has been that as a member of the Palaszczuk government I cannot speak on behalf of future governments of Queensland, but what I do know is that the LNP are here sitting around the table. We have Mark Robinson and Stephen Bennett. The LNP have committed to the Path to Treaty process. They are the two major parties in Queensland.

Mr Dempsey: So you cannot just chuck this away? We have waited five years and on the last day someone cannot walk in and use it as a doormat?

CHAIR: Stephen, did you want to make a comment?

Mr BENNETT: Again, you cannot pre-empt what will happen in future governments but I think it would be a brave day when any future Queensland government would walk away from a process that has been thought through by respectful thinking Queenslanders. I hear the stuff you are talking about with minor parties and that is why they are always a disruption, right? I do not think there is much risk of that ever happening again in this state. We have committed to it. At this stage, I think it is the right time for all Queenslanders to continue down the path. I ask people to be positive, stick to their guns and remain focused and we will get through it. I think we will all be judged for our actions anyway on this issue. I do not see any real threats to it. I really do not.

Dr ROBINSON: Chair, because it is a legislated process I think that gives it another level of long-term commitment from all those in the parliament who will vote on this. Again, I cannot speak for the Labor Party or different ones that are going to have a range of takes on it in their local areas; however, the fact is that the legislation puts in place an institute of First Nations leaders who will drive that process and work and it will come from the grassroots. It is a framework locked in legislation and then the framework provides for the grassroots input into what those agreements are over time. My sense of it is that every member of parliament supports that and better outcomes.

Exactly what happens in the fine detail over time is going to be a matter for those local TO groups to work through. There are questions about how it might be structured. A lot of those things are there to be determined by Indigenous groups. It is a different process to the past. It is one that has far more ownership by traditional owners and First Nations people.

Like Steve, it is hard to imagine a parliament situation where all of the members of parliament would not support the process and then the final outcomes come out from that. In simple terms, it is a legislative process that locks it in. It would be highly improbable that a future government would try to undo all of that. To me, there will be no going back in that sense.

Mr BENNETT: We will still be here in five years anyway!

Dr ROBINSON: It comes back to the parliament for the second reading debate. That will happen in the parliamentary sitting in May. The government determines the time frames and they have said that will be the case. In Cairns then that will be debated and passed. Then that process kicks in from that next stage. I think there is a lot of confidence that people have in the broad direction of where this is going.

Mr BENNETT: We actually agree on more than we disagree on. I know it does not look like that on TV, but the bipartisanship of the work that we do as a committee—yes, we bump heads and we kick shins and stuff, but we actually probably agree on more than we disagree on in this parliament. I think that is reflective in these sorts of important social reforms and acknowledgements. It is not all 'because they said something we have to disagree with it'. It does not work like that. I want to reassure you that while it looks like that it is not.

CHAIR: Thanks, Steve. I acknowledge the LNP, their work and their commitment to this very important cause. Steve and Mark are right: the way we are portrayed on television and the relationships we have often are very different to the work that we do collectively. There are 93 parliamentarians who sit in the Queensland parliament. More often than not, we agree rather than disagree.

Ladies and gentlemen, are there any final comments before I wrap up? Does anyone have a pressing issue or comment they would like to make?

I want to thank each and every one here today. I know that we have taken you away from your core business. I also know that you are here because this matter is very important to you. It is very important to us. We are very encouraged by the conversations we have had. We are very encouraged by what was said today. We really appreciate your feedback.

I can also share with you that it is incumbent on every single one of us to spread the word about the Path to Treaty. This will not be as successful as it could be unless we all take ownership. As has been said here today, non-Indigenous Queenslanders absolutely need to take some ownership over this as well in order for us to be successful as a state.

I thank everyone here today. Thank you for giving up your time. Thank you for your work in your local communities and for all that you do. We certainly appreciate what you do and appreciate all that you do to challenge people's understandings and to make Queensland a better state. As we know, our difference is our strength. We have a lot to celebrate here in Queensland. Thank you, everyone. I declare the forum closed.

The committee adjourned at 1.52 pm.