



# **COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**Members present:**

Ms CP McMillan MP—Chair  
Mr SA Bennett MP  
Ms CL Lui MP  
Dr MA Robinson MP

**In attendance:**

Hon. SJ Stewart (via teleconference)

**Staff present:**

Ms L Pretty—Committee Secretary

## **PUBLIC FORUM—INQUIRY INTO THE PATH TO TREATY BILL 2023**

### **TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

**Wednesday, 22 March 2023**

**Palm Island**

## WEDNESDAY, 22 MARCH 2023

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**The committee met at 10.00 am.**

**CHAIR:** I sincerely thank everyone for being here today. I will pass to Aunty Daphne, who is going to welcome us to country.

*Aunty Daphne Cummings then gave a welcome to country.*

**CHAIR:** Well done and thank you, Aunty. Good morning everyone. I too acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet this morning and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. I acknowledge the traditional owners of Bwgcolman and the Manbarra people, whose lands we meet on today. I also acknowledge Cynthia Lui, the member for Cook. She is the first Torres Strait Islander to be elected to any Queensland or Australian parliament. We acknowledge Cynthia and thank her for her custodianship. We know that we are very fortunate to live on land that has been occupied for more than 60,000 years by our First Nations peoples, whose lands, winds and waters we are all so lucky to share.

My name is Corrine McMillan. I am the member for Mansfield in Brisbane. I am chair of the committee. Mr Stephen Bennett, the member for Burnett, is the deputy chair. Ms Cynthia Lui, as I mentioned, is the member for Cook. Dr Mark Robinson is the member for Oodgeroo. We are really fortunate to be here today to talk to you about the Path to Treaty Bill, which was introduced into the parliament a couple of weeks ago by the Premier. The purpose of today's forum is to assist the committee with its deliberations around the bill.

I would also like to acknowledge Minister Scott Stewart, who is the local member for Palm Island. He is on the phone. He is really sorry he could not be here but he could not get a flight. Scott, do you want to say g'day?

**Mr STEWART:** Thanks, Corrine, and thanks to everyone who has turned up at Palm Island. It is a very beautiful place. I think getting the perspective of our Palm Island people is very important, so I thank the committee for making the effort to actually get across to Palm Island. I also thank the Palm Island community members who have submitted and turned up today. This is really important. This is where the committee gets to hear from you about what we need to do to make sure that we progress this. It is part of the reconciliation process but also it is about hearing the truth and getting the true stories told. Thank you, everyone, for your attendance. I really appreciate it.

**CHAIR:** Thanks, Scott. You are right: Palm Island is a really beautiful place. It is my first time here. It is a really gorgeous place in the world. Scotty, you would be really proud of your Palm Island community. They are here and certainly keen to contribute. It is really great.

I note that Mick Gooda was here yesterday talking with you about the Path to Treaty process. The Path to Treaty is a negotiation process between our First Nations peoples and our Queensland government. We believe that it is 235 years overdue, that there should have been a treaty many, many, many years ago. That never happened. We are committed to the treaty process and to making treaty with our First Nations communities. We know that, as a result of colonisation, for over 235 years our First Nations communities have been incredibly oppressed. We know that our First Nations children continue to suffer the impacts and the influence of colonisation. We know that there is so much hurt, that there is so much sadness and that there is so much truth that has not been told about what happened over those 235 years.

The bill is really about two things. One is that it proposes to establish an institute to manage the treaty process and to help our First Nations people make a treaty with the state government or with each other. There may be groups that want to make a treaty with each other. There may be groups that may wish to make a treaty with Torres Strait Islander peoples, depending on where you are in Queensland. One aspect of the bill is around the institute and how they will best support First Nations communities to develop a treaty.

The other part of the bill is that we embed or we engage in a truth-telling inquiry. That truth-telling inquiry would run for about three years. It really would be the opportunity for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Queenslanders to share the truth about what happened over 240 years, because we believe as a government that unless we tell the truth we cannot take Queenslanders with us on the journey. Queenslanders on the whole, somewhat through no fault of Palm Island

their own, are quite ignorant about what happened because most Queenslanders have never been taught. The history of Australia that most Queenslanders have been taught in our schools is one side of the story.

The bill really talks about those two aspects. We are here today to hear your views and to make sure that we acknowledge and recognise the contribution of the Palm Island community in the bill and that we provide that opportunity for you to give feedback to our government around the bill. The bill is a very initial step. It is probably the smallest step in the whole process. The bill will pass in May of this year and that is when the real work starts. It will be after the bill is passed. There will be lots of other opportunities for consultation and so on.

I might hand over to one of you to offer your thoughts or any suggestions you have. Is there anyone who might like to make a little suggestion or start today?

**WOTTON, Mr Lex, Private capacity**

**Mr Wotton:** Those who were not present yesterday did not hear what was discussed so, hopefully, there might be an opportunity for Mick to come back.

**Mr BENNETT:** He tried to this morning, Lex.

**Mr Wotton:** Yes, he said that.

**CHAIR:** He tried to get on a plane this morning, as did Minister Stewart, your local member, but there were no flights.

**Mr Wotton:** Now we have some people taking part in this process and others—

**CHAIR:** They did not get to hear yesterday.

**Mr Wotton:** Yes. They did not get involved in some other stuff yesterday. A lot of that stuff that we discussed yesterday was about some of the things you are saying about treaties between each other and treaties between community and state, and then the wider public. What process will take place with the state engaging non-Indigenous Queenslanders as a whole around this process? What is happening when it comes to a treaty? Like you said, they are unaware of treaty and why and all of this and that because of a lack of education and everything else. Will there be a process to educate because, given a community like this, a lot of people do not understand treaty. A lot of people here, I know, have not been out on the streets in the big cities like myself, at the forefront. That is the main thing we fought for: treaty. We want a treaty. Yes, the state has taken the initiative now, but for the ministers around the table, what do they understand about treaty for their own educational purposes? That is another thing we have to—

**CHAIR:** You are right, Lex. There is a big impetus on all of us. To be honest with you, there is probably a greater impetus on non-Indigenous Queenslanders to make sure that non-Indigenous Queenslanders understand this in order to support you. I imagine that, once the treaty bill is passed, there will be a pretty significant communication strategy by the government to try to educate Queenslanders around what we are doing.

**Mr Wotton:** Do they understand the impact of a treaty? Because there is truth-telling and so on and then we are talking about a partnership between Indigenous Queenslanders and the state government. The state government speaks on behalf of all Queenslanders but there is this connection thing with treaty and there are all these responsibilities that go with it. Like we said, there is truth-telling and then we talk about finances that go with that, whether it is repatriation or whatever. There is all of this stuff that non-Indigenous Queenslanders need to understand. Will there then be a flow-back after the bill is passed? My understanding is that the bill needs to be passed and that you want to go out then.

**CHAIR:** Yes. The responsibility and the accountability is definitely on our government to make sure that that happens, Lex. I know that the member for Cook has something to say in response.

**Ms LUI:** That is a really good point, Lex. Our government intends to push forward with this bill and to get all Queenslanders on board with us. I value your contribution here today. Some of my colleagues in state parliament have been out there engaging their communities, because it is really important that we all have this conversation. I know Minister Farmer has held conversations in her electorate. The member for Cooper has held conversations. Different members are going out there pulling in people from their community to come and have a conversation about treaty.

There has been a lot of positive feedback and lots of questions, and that is a good thing. From our perspective—certainly from the Labor Party—we are wanting the Queenslanders to come on board with us because it is all of us. When we talk about strengthening and reframing the relationship with government, it is also about bringing non-Indigenous and Indigenous Queenslanders to write a new narrative for our future so it becomes all of Queensland, not just Indigenous/non-Indigenous.

The whole intent for Path to Treaty now is to get feedback from our Indigenous communities because, as we know, sovereignty was never ceded; treaty was never negotiated. That is why we are starting this conversation. At the same time there will be a need for lots of conversation, education and awareness so that all Queenslanders come on board with us.

**Mr BENNETT:** If I may go on further with what Cynthia is saying, I am non-government but we are supportive of this as well. I do not know that we ever think these things should not be bipartisan. I want to provide another context. From the government's perspective—and the whole of government's perspective—entrenching process in legislation is something that has never happened before. There has been talk and things have been done. It has been said, 'This is going to be in legislation.' It has also been enshrined with a significant investment by the Palaszczuk Labor government to ensure that the future fund is there for the negotiations to be meaningful and to be able to be carried out. The important step in May is that we enshrine the process in legislation for eternity; this process has to go forward. That is why all Queenslanders should be embracing this particular step in the bigger process. It is a first step, but it is enshrining it in legislation and I think that is an important step. The government needs to be acknowledged for taking that step to start a process that basically will not be unravelled. I hope that helps.

**CHAIR:** Before I introduce you, Mr Lacey, I acknowledge Mayor Sam, who has arrived. It is good to have you here. Over to you, Mr Lacey.

**LACEY, Mr Alf, Private capacity**

**Mr Lacey:** First of all, in terms of my comments—and Cynthia has touched on it—like Lex, I am one of those guys who in the early days was on the streets and, yes, treaty was always talked about. If we look at the makarrata discussions at the NAC, the National Aboriginal Conference, in the early days it talked about moving towards something. Like Cynthia said—and I am very strong on it and I know there is a lot of national conversation happening at the moment in terms of, yes, we never ceded our sovereignty; always was, always will be, whether we are sitting at this table or our children who come after us are, until agreement. Basically, treaty is about agreement making. I want to commend both sides of the House for taking the big leap.

If we go back and look at the Bjelke-Petersen days, this type of conversation with a blackfella and a whitefella sitting around the table and talking was a no-no. I want to commend the parliament and both sides of the House for taking the big step in terms of helping Queensland and all Queenslanders, including us. We cannot undo the past, but we can make it better for our children. That is the important thing.

I want to also commend the Indigenous representative in parliament in Cynthia. I have done a lot of work with Cynthia's father, Gaetano. Leeanne has been around for quite some time. It is certainly good to see our people sitting down in the halls of parliament, particularly the Queensland parliament. We should take our hats off to the person who broke the ground for it, a former member for Cook, Uncle Eric Deeral. Uncle Eric entered the parliament when it was not fashionable for a blackfella to be sitting in parliament. Some acknowledgement also needs to go to Uncle Eric. He is deceased now, but his legacy lives on in people like Cynthia, Leeanne and a few others.

What the state has embarked on, particularly the parliament—and I want to also commend the committee for putting Palm Island on the calendar and coming and hearing from our people around it. There is going to be a lot of conversation, like Lex said earlier on. It is pretty light on the ground in terms of that. I think it is up to all of us to put those things on the ground. The session with Mick yesterday was quite informative. Like Lex said, we did invite Mick to come back again to have a general community conversation around it, which is really important. The thing for the committee is that we are getting somewhere. It is something that has been talked about not just today or in the last year; it has been talked about for a very long time. It comes back to the point that we have never ceded our sovereignty.

The only other question, which I had a conversation with Cynthia earlier on around, is: does the Queensland Constitution recognise the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of this state?

**CHAIR:** Mr Lacey, thank you. Thanks for your question. Firstly I will respond to a couple of comments you made following on from Mr Wotton. Anything that we do in life that is worthwhile is usually hard. We know that this process and this journey that we are going on may not be easy, but we believe that whatever is worthwhile, no matter how hard, is worth it. That is the first thing: it is a journey and there is a lot of work to do. I cannot answer your question, but it is certainly something that we can take back as feedback to our Premier and our government. It is certainly a very good question and a worthwhile issue that you have raised. Leave that with us and we will endeavour to get a little bit more information about that.

**Mr Wotton:** Can I just suggest that what Alf said about that recognition also be included as part of this bill? That might be the way to do it. If we are talking about treaty with the First Nations people and the state, that recognition should be part of the bill. That might be a way forward.

**CHAIR:** That is very good feedback. I am sorry, I cannot answer that for you today. I just do not have that knowledge.

**Mr Wotton:** I am not expecting you to do so.

**CHAIR:** It is certainly a very good idea.

**Mr Wotton:** To add to that point, I am just looking at the human rights declaration on free nations. Maybe that should be included. They do not recognise it in the international arena, so why can the state then not recognise it? That is the way forward.

**CHAIR:** That is right. That is a really good point.

**Ms LUI:** Can I add to that? I think the Path to Treaty Bill is definitely that first step to reframing that relationship with First Nations people. What overarches that is that recognition given back to us. So when we negotiate a treaty between government and First Nations people, we are also looking at forging that relationship between different clan groups throughout.

That is a very good point that you have raised. I think government has passed some very significant bills in parliament that give that recognition to First Nations people. We passed the bill regarding Torres Strait Islander traditional practice for adoption. That was a significant one that the government worked with the Torres Strait community to legislate and there were a lot of barriers around that. I think it was a bold step by the government. We are currently reviewing the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act. That is another thing; we are working with First Nations communities to strengthen that cultural heritage. That is very significant for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

There are lots of good things. We worked with the Quandamooka people around land hand-back. The government is currently doing a lot of significant things. It is about giving recognition back to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. At the same time, we are also implementing Thriving Communities, and Dr Chris Sarra is heavily involved in that one. Thriving Communities is about local decision-making and giving empowerment back to community to make decisions around issues that impact First Nations people.

We are taking small steps, but it is certainly in the direction of the point you raised here this morning. I want to acknowledge there are some good things happening but we are also working towards the bigger picture that you are talking about.

**Mr Wotton:** I personally know what steps you are taking. Dr Chris Sarra had problems—even here locally, even in the case of the department—just getting a nomination form. Because I am outspoken, I am given the run-around—I have to be honest about it—just to try to sit at a table. The department, the CEO of council—everyone was giving me the run-around and I could not get a form, even when I went and asked a month earlier. When we talk about treaty and openness, accountability, honesty et cetera, you cannot afford, even in your own community—and that was discussed yesterday. We are going to have treaties between ourselves—between traditional owners and historical owners. All of that has to take place. I see here you mentioned about Palm and its treaty with the state. Palm should be recognised because a lot of the things it did were at the forefront of a lot of changes throughout the state through its development—whatever—and it is history so it should be part of a treaty. That is one of the other things I would like to have.

Yes, I understand when you talk about what is happening with Chris Sarra and others. A lot of people here may not be aware of what is happening around that, too. That is a lot of the things that I am about; there is no accountability and transparency. You have to be aware of these things. A lot of people here are not engaged politically or engaged in the whole social life and fabric because there is a lot of dysfunction. Hopefully, out of this will come something better. People might be offended by how I speak, but I do not speak for them if I do not speak for them; I speak for others outside.

**CHAIR:** I think you raise important issues for any community, Mr Wotton. The qualities and sentiments that you raise are important regardless of the community. Wherever you are in Queensland, they are important to all communities in order for us to go forward and to ensure that the next 235 years are better than the last. Thank you.

**Mr Wotton:** We have been lied to for so long. We want partnerships with community. Government departments come in. We have a partnership with the local council—'We are going to this and that'; no-one lives up to things on the department and government side of things. We are left stranded. Hopefully when we start talking about truth and treaty all of these things might be said and come to light. There are things with mining companies. There is a whole range of things where people have to be held accountable.

**CHAIR:** Yes, and they have to be honest about what happens.

**Mr Wotton:** I think people would agree that it is a good thing that we are at this point. Hopefully the bill gets passed—is in October?

**CHAIR:** May. We hope to be debating the bill in Cairns in May. There is regional parliament in Cairns and we hope to debate it there. To follow up for Mr Lacey, the deputy chair had a quick look at the Constitution. Apparently in 2009 Anna Bligh introduced a Constitution which recognised First Nations Queenslanders in the preamble. We will get more information about that and get it to you.

**Mr BENNETT:** Updated in 2011, Mr Lacey.

**Mr Lacey:** The treaty conversation is going to be a whole-of-community conversation. We certainly all need to be on board with it. Cynthia raised Thriving Communities in terms of some of the things that Lex raised, which is important. I will say it again—and I have said it publicly before: the Thriving Communities process is one of the processes that I support quite dearly. I think it will make

a big difference in our community. I think it will go hand in hand with the treaty process. The treaty process in itself is not about us sitting around this table. It is not about blackfellas—I make that point quite clearly—particularly if you have been involved at the state or national level. It is about bringing the rest of the state with us.

**CHAIR:** Absolutely.

**Mr Lacey:** We know what treaty is about. For us to have a level playing field, we need the rest of Queensland on board. There are good Queenslanders out there, whether they are in politics or not, who are very supportive of changes that will benefit the day-to-day lives of our people. Yes, we do have our own community issues. That is for the community to sort out. That is not for the government to sort out; that is for this community to sort out. We have invited Mick back again. He has taken up the offer. Unfortunately he could not get on the plane. Is Scott still there?

**CHAIR:** Yes, Scott is still on the phone.

**Mr Lacey:** They do not get across here. My take on it all would be, particularly when it comes to our community members, how we take the responsibility and rally the troops to have the open conversation. We were quite clear when we spoke to Mick yesterday. I very strongly support a co-existence agreement, because most of the people sitting around this table at the moment are not the traditional owners of this country. We are the Bwgcolman people, the historical people where our forefathers and foremothers were dragged here by chains. Manbarra are the traditional owners. This community needs an agreement with the Manbarra people and agreement amongst ourselves. Lex is quite right on that. There are over 40 different tribes in this community from all across the state who ended up here through no fault of their own. It was because of the White Australia Policy of the day.

Now is a turning point. I would love to be around when we have settled all our grievances. For the sake of our children and their children and their children, we have to take some responsibility and own up to some of our own mistakes and step up and bring the community with us. Lex is right that not a lot of people will come to the table. They will rely on people like ourselves to be at the table and for us to pass that information back. Cynthia knows this. It happens in the Torres Strait. It happens in the cape. Palm is not unique. We are just a cog in the wheel.

The main thing with the treaty—as I said earlier, I commend the House and this committee for what you are doing—is that it is not talking to the converted. We cannot be preaching to the converted. We have to be talking to outside communities—the communities of Townsville and Mount Isa and rural communities—and bringing them on the journey. We want them to walk side by side with us—not whitefella in front and blackfella behind but side by side. This is what this process should be about. Yes, we do have our community issues. That is for us to resolve. Most importantly, we have to put an issue to bed that has been 240 years in the making. I will leave it at that, Madam Chair.

**CHAIR:** Mr Lacey, thank you. That was so well articulated and so well said. You are absolutely right in terms of what we need to do. It is incumbent upon every single one of us to do that work. Well done—very well articulated.

## **FRIDAY, Mr Robert, Private capacity**

**Mr Friday:** Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I was born on Palm Island. I am a traditional owner but I represent Bwgcolman. I am not a Manbarra. My tribe is the Bwgcolman. That is what it is all about. I am not from the Manbarra tribe. I am from the Bwgcolman tribe. I was born on Palm Island.

I have read a lot of land treaties. I have a book at home about land treaties. I am ambivalent about all this today. I am sorry if I hurt people with my feelings and my disturbance of the whole good. (Indistinct). While this was all going on I did not care. I left school. I worked in the 60s. I built this island. I spent locally. I still spend locally today. I spent locally wherever I go. I have money put away for myself. I work for the AWU here and on the mainland.

Treaty has been going on for years—since I left school and learned all about land rights. I know where I come from—Palm Island. I am a traditional owner. Palm Island is also part of Australia. Where the money comes from does not matter. It could come from any nation. If Palm Island wanted money we could get it from any nation we want, not only Australia.

There are a lot of things about treaties. They are very dangerous. Treaty rules are very dangerous to live with. I always had ambivalence towards other people and how they feel about land rights. My issue is that I always think about kids. How do the kids feel about this today and what we have told them for ages? We have riots. This land is causing a lot of trouble. Poverty is relative. It is happening everywhere in the world. If there was poverty on Palm Island there would be no Palm Island. We would have no money. We would have nothing.

We have to build up this issue today, try to work together and be honest with each other. If you want to break the law, join the law-breakers and do whatever. We have a problem with drugs on the island. There are problems with drugs everywhere in the world. When it comes to land rights in America, the Indians did not worry about land rights. Why should we worry about land rights? I am not worried about land rights. That is where my children are coming from.

I have changed my way of life. That is through all my ambivalence. I have been leaning on ambivalence all my life—since I left school. I have a good education. I never went to college but I know a lot about myself. I do not say I know everything. With the path we are going on now, we are all in the same boat. We are rocking the boat today. We had land rights here before and nothing happened. We got something out of it. We got our stolen wages. I believe there are more stolen wages coming through the government. We had programs and we still have them.

I have a good conscience. I say what I want to say. It is alright for me to say what I want or what I need and I have to ask for it. I don't go stealing; I ask. If I ask the land baron for land, I have to pay for that land. If I want land on the island, I have to pay for it. It is going to cost me four grand to buy land here. The government sold land two, three, four years ago. People do have land. Some bought at Wallaby Point. They got land at Wallaby Point, Ram Bay—everywhere. When they asked us about all this treaty and that, about if we want to buy land, it is going to cost me to buy a house. I do not own a house on the island. I bought it, but I own nothing. I have nowhere to go.

My tribe come from Cooktown. My totem is the cockatoo. I do not class myself as Australian; I class myself as a Kuku Yalanji. That is my culture. My father was born in Mossman but we are traditionally from Cooktown. That is where I got my name, from Cooktown: Friday. Friday is an Irish name. It is not about treaty. I am not a slave. We were given English names because we did not know how. Our ancestors did not know how too. They did not know anything about the land, but they hunted and survived. That is why treaties are very dangerous.

I look on YouTube. Samoa has lost everything. They are having problems over there with China. That is what Palm Island is going to be like. Probably China will come here and take this land too. Things are getting worse every day. It is all about ambivalence. The existence of this land treaty today is about the existence of contradictory emotional feelings towards an object—and this is the object right in front of you, the treaty—commonly of love and hate for another person. If these feelings occur to a marked degree they lead to physiological disturbances, and that is what we are having today.

The government is trying to negotiate with us for this land, Australia. This is part of Australia. We spend a lot in Townsville, Ingham or anywhere we go. If we want to go there, we have to spend locally when we live there, but I would rather spend locally here. I have spent locally in Mount Isa. I used to work all my life on the railway. I got on good with the government. They gave me jobs. If we do not see things your way, it is what you want to do. You do not listen to anyone else; it is what you want to do. I am not going to tell you what to do. My father did not tell me what to do. I sat down beside my father on the farm. We had a coconut house. My father planted all the coconut leaf. We



had a coconut house to live in and that was his job, to plant coconut leaf. He knew about this. That is why he settled here. They took his land off him up there in Cooktown. They took his land. That is why he got the name Friday. He got it from an Irish sailor who was with Captain Cook. He pulled into Cooktown. History will always repeat itself, whichever way you look at it. You can sit all day and worry about what is going to happen next. Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Mr Friday. I am sure that would have been very difficult for you. We appreciate your contribution and the opportunity to learn from you and some of your story. Is there anyone else who would like to speak?

**SAM, Mr Mislam, Mayor, Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council**

**Mr Sam:** After yesterday's workshop with Mick Gooda, and it was quite apparent even going over the bill last night, we probably cannot investigate it further at this stage, but I echo some of the comments that were said already here that acknowledge how brave the state government is currently in regards to going down this road. As we heard from Uncle Robert Friday, the biggest takeout I got from what he was talking about is not letting history repeat itself. We are moving in the right direction. It is all about the next generation and the opportunities we can provide. Alf touched on it. It is all about coming together.

I made a few comments yesterday. We got to talking about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the learnings from South Africa. If you look at the example of that great man Mandela and what he said, he was persecuted for that many years and locked away in a jail cell. He came out with full power and the wisdom that he learned over years and years that he did not bring everyone with him to make real changes. Because we all play a part in every facet of our lives, it does not matter where we go. When you get the opportunity to get overseas and you see different ways of life, you appreciate how special we have it, even though we have been under the gun for many a decade. Unfortunately, as everyone touched on here, some of our elders have passed on. It would have been beneficial if they were here to see something that they have been fighting for for many years throughout their working and political lives.

I want to commend both sides of government because, at the end of the day, this will achieve real outcomes, but we need more. We need bravery in the sense of homeownership. On some of the plans we have in with the state government right now, we need bravery in the sense of community policing models to move forward and really address some of the law and order issues locally in community. We need law and order on the basis of community development to give these young fellas an opportunity in life. Locking them up is not the answer. We all know that. There has been an investment of over \$300 million, and one question we keep asking is: give us the data and the stats so we can look at it and really investigate other measures forward in regards to what can be of more benefit out of that one dollar that is invested in Palm Island. Forever and a day we see wastage right across the whole island in terms of funding and all that stuff. We see many failures.

We have to be honest. At the end of the day, what is the real cost of closing the gap on Palm Island for our kids? What future in terms of closing the gap are we allowing for in moving forward, because we can go around the table forever and a day and talk about things but at the end of the day some of the finger pointing has to be directly at ourselves. We can do better moving forward with a united front, working towards a better way of life for our kids. Most of us are three-quarters of the way through our working life. There has to be a better way. This is all part of it. You can see where everything is aligned in the sense of this treaty bill, the LTC that Lex talked about, and most of that is underpinned by the Human Rights Commission and all that stuff because most of the learnings come from that. It is all about those place-based solutions.

Again I want to commend the state government in starting to really make a forward road that we can look at that will have much success in the future for the next generation. After looking at the bill last night, there is really nothing I can add, but again I commend the members of parliament. You are being brave, but we need to be braver. Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Mayor. That was very well said. Is there anyone else, perhaps one of the women of our community, who would like to come forward?

## **COUTTS, Ms Marina, Private capacity**

**Ms Coutts:** I enjoyed the workshop yesterday with Mick Gooda. I think it is about time. I agree with what is happening and the parties that have been involved in getting this on the way for our community, especially our community doing all the historical research around Palm Island, because I want to know where we come from. I think for our community we really need to get that right. A few years ago I answered something on Facebook about history, what happened to our people, and I did not get any good comments at that time and I thought there is a lot of ignorance in Australia.

I have worked with non-Indigenous department people, side by side. I did all my education on the mainland. I say to myself, 'I can walk hand in hand with these people. I can walk side by side with these people. I am just as smart and I am just as knowledgeable.' I was born here. I went away when I was four years old. I came back to the island about 10 years later, after I finished all my education, and I could see that this was my home; this was my country. I was born here. It was a totally different place compared to the mainland. I went to school with people of different nationalities—all Australians—and I never understood my own culture because I was not taught it. When I came back here, I learned who I was as an Aboriginal person. I have embraced it. I am always researching about my people—about the struggles, the good stories, the success stories—and I am always about going further with my people and learning from our mistakes, learning what has happened in history. I think that is the place all our people have to start at. Each of us has to learn about our past and share that with the white Australian community. Just listening to all the conversation yesterday made me feel so good that something is finally happening. I want to keep going forward.

Like Alf said, we all have to walk together. We have to walk together, hand in hand. We have to get a lot of things straight in our community, history wise, because I know that when a lot of our old people first came here there was no-one here. This is the historical people. I have read documents and I have looked at historical records from the time Palm Island was gazetted in 1914. A lot of our people do not know that. I am all about sharing that history to our people and educating them. I think it is very important. We tried it at the Bwgcolman Community School with the Palm Island Studies, but that information did not filter out to the community. It was just the kids at that time. Even to this day, when we celebrate NAIDOC people are still not well informed about our history.

I think for us to continue with this we have to get it right. Like Alf was saying with the co-existence agreement with the traditional owners, we have to get it right. For us to move forward, we have to get that right before we can even get it right with the white Australian community. I am very positive that things are finally happening and are getting going. I want to applaud Mick and his committee here. Even though they are an interim committee, at least they have the ball rolling and we have a voice. We can step up and put our two cents worth in, too.

**CHAIR:** Absolutely. Ms Coutts, that was really well said. When you mentioned the fact that you as a First Nations person were not clear about your story, it highlights one of the reasons white Australians, non-Indigenous people, are so ignorant as well. Those are really important points. We thank you for your contribution.

We are conscious of time. We do have to get to the plane for 11.45. We may have to start packing up but, as we pack up, it would be really good if committee members could just chat to some of those folks who did not get a chance to speak. We might allow Hansard to pack up, but I know that you have a couple of things that you want to share.

**Mr Wotton:** Quickly before you close, that is the attitude government have towards our community: fly in, deliver little speeches, go away. That has got to stop. You come, you come maybe for a night, you get in and you sit down and you talk, you discuss, you listen, you take on board. That is what has been missing for years. Then when you do, it is just put on a piece of paper that sits on a shelf, gathering dust. Those reports have been going on for years. When the mayor talks about closing the gap, back on the ground we have to be open and honest. There is no accountability towards the taxpayer dollars.

**CHAIR:** Mr Wotton, you are absolutely right.

**Mr Wotton:** I know I am right.

**CHAIR:** Mick Gooda has committed to coming back. We will continue. The next three- or four-year journey—

**Mr Wotton:** It may be longer.

**CHAIR:**—will be more and more consultation.

**Mr Wotton:** It should be extended, hopefully.

**Mr Lacey:** Madam Chair, Dave has a couple of comments to make before you close.

**BULSEY, Mr David, Private capacity**

**Mr Bulsey:** I am not from Palm Island. I am from (indistinct) Island. I have been here since 1954. I will be 71 in three months. Now I (indistinct) and we got to get it right with our people. A lot of the people on this island do not understand treaty. We have to do it as a community to educate everybody because it is all about us. It is all about the First Nations people. It is all of us. It is not there for just one in the community, but we have to educate this community as to what this is about.

**CHAIR:** Yes, we need to educate the whole of Queensland.

**Mr Bulsey:** It affects us all.

**CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr Bulsey:** But I can tell you, lady, everyone in this room, we all experience racism in this country. We have a big problem with racism in this country.

**CHAIR:** We do. Well said. Ladies and gentlemen, we do very much apologise for having to go, but committee members are around the table and will continue having chats while Hansard packs up. We do thank you immensely for your time this morning. We hope to get back here in the not-too-distant future. Thank you so much for your contributions and your feedback. We will close this meeting formally. We thank you very much.

**The committee adjourned at 11.05 am.**