

## Path to Treaty Bill 2023

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Committee Secretary  
 Community Support and Services Committee  
 Parliament House  
 George Street  
 Brisbane Qld 4000

Ross Daniels - Submission re Path to Treaty Bill 2023

Ms Corrine McMillan MP, Member for Mansfield (Chair)

Dear Ms McMillan

I introduce myself as an Iman Aboriginal man, a member of the Iman Nation and the Iman Wardingarri Aboriginal Corporation. My country is centred on Taroom and extends through many towns in the Western Downs having a significant connection to the Wardingarri River. You may know this by the colonial imposed name of the Dawson River. I respect IMAN people's inherent native title rights, cultural values, spiritual beliefs, and their living relationship with country.

I discovered my Iman Heritage only a couple of years ago and since that time I have made many visits to Country and had significant interactions with members of the Iman Wardingarri Aboriginal Corporation, Elders and numerous newly found Iman cousins. For various reasons my Indigenous heritage was a well-kept family secret. Paradoxically, since confirming my Iman identity, this has been actively embraced by my four adult children and enthusiastically welcomed by my four grandchildren. Their engagement with many aspects of Iman culture is the reverse of my early childhood experience.

I have spent considerable time during periods of my life actively engaged in matters relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations, Peoples, and communities. In so doing I have some understanding of the genocidal history which underpins the State of Queensland. Genocide is a word not to be used lightly but in the context of the atrocities, massacres, rapes, poisonings, forced removals, slavery, stolen wages, mandatory adoptions and cultural destruction the word genocide is more than appropriate. It is made immeasurably worse by the fact that various governments of the lands that are now collectively called Queensland were complicit in the face of mass murder and turned a blind eye to innumerable cruelties.

The discovery and confirmation of my Iman heritage has multiple dimensions. It is an absolute privilege to sit with powerful Iman Elders and to listen to their stories. I sit with admiration for their resilience and determination to resurrect their Nation and People. Some history books describe the Iman nation as no longer existing. It is only through the extraordinary courage of the Iman Elders that the Nation has not only survived but is experiencing a powerful resurgence. However, as I have had the opportunity to walk with some Elders on country, I have become increasingly aware that there is hardly a square metre which is not covered in the blood of those killed in numerous massacres in our past history.

It is in this context that I tentatively welcome the initiative from the current Queensland government to move on Treaty Making and Truth Telling. I hope that this process will reveal the real history of these lands. I hope that there will be recognition that for thousands of years before invasion - euphemistically called colonisation - the Country of the Iman people and Iman Nation was occupied, cared for, and provided everything needed for the extraordinary survival of the world's longest living culture. Obviously, my comments relate to all Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations, Peoples, and communities.

In summary, in stark contrast to my upbringing, I hope this treaty and truth telling will allow my children and my grandchildren to understand and accept the horrific history, which is our past, and, at the same time, show extraordinary respect for the resilience, survival, dignity and generosity of all Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations, Peoples, and communities. And in so doing gain a deep appreciation of ancient ceremonies, Dreamtime stories, Song Lines, lore, and the plethora of knowledge of the oldest and still living culture – the only one on our planet.

I have already been party to two organisational submissions to your inquiry. These delved into quite specific details and critiques of certain technical aspects of the proposed legislation.

Hence, in this submission, I simply want to focus on questions and concerns that I have about consultation, information, and communication flows. I put it to your committee that if consultation, information and communication flows are flawed the paths to treaty and truth telling will fail.

The Path to Treaty Bill 2023, the associated Path to Treaty Explanatory Memorandum and the October 2021 Report from the Treaty Advancement Committee (TAC) all use the same words in describing the processes underpinning Treaty Making and Truth Telling. It is alleged to be a process of codesign, genuine cooperation, a shared journey, mutual respect, cultural sensitivity, and understanding to the real life situations faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations, Peoples, and communities.

As stated, for the past two years I have been heavily involved with my Iman Nation, Elders and the wider community. I have attended Annual General Meetings, Authorisation Meetings and NAIDOC days held at Taroom. I can tell your committee without the slightest hesitation that consultation, information and communication flows about treaty and truth telling have been appalling. It may well be that there is a perception of consultation and that is clearly the position in the report from TAC. That is not the experience of the 1000 members of the Iman nation and certainly not the experience of the Elders of the Iman Corporation. As far as I can determine in the past two years not one communication has been directed to the Iman Corporation Board. As far as I can determine not one piece of information has found its way to Taroom. I am confident that a survey of Iman people would reveal that few would have any idea of what is proposed in truth telling and treaty. While my comments related to my experiences with the Iman Nation, I am confident they have a wider general application.

I remind your committee that there is supposed to be respect for the realities of the lives of First Nations' Peoples. The timeline for submissions to your committee is a classic and unfortunate example of a disrespectful process. The Path to Treaty Bill 2023 was introduced into Parliament on 22 February 2023 and referred to your committee. The closing date for written submissions was set for 12:00pm (noon) Friday, 17 March 2023. How do you expect an already overworked Iman Wardingarrri Aboriginal Corporation Board to respond to an immense and consequential Bill in such a nonsensical time frame? How do you expect them to set up a meaningful consultation with 1000 members in such a disrespectful time frame? How do they resource legal advice within a couple of weeks and, more to the point, how do they pay for that? Your Committee has an abundance of resources. If you actually understood the real life situations of First Nations Peoples you would never set such a time frame. This was set to suit the convenience of Parliament and your Committee's schedule. It was not set in accordance with the realities of the lives of the Iman people that I have come to know. There is no point in saying this is unfortunate, it is actually a contradiction of all the principles that are supposed to underpin this treaty and truth telling process. I put this before you as bluntly as possible simply because at the very outset of this process it demonstrates a significant failure to put words into practice.

I do not intend to labour the point but I think deficiencies about consultation, information, and communication flows apply equally to many of the prior consultations conducted by the TAC and prior path to treaty bodies. They certainly apply to the Path to Treaty Office.

It should be absolutely self-evident that getting consultation, information, and communication flows right is fundamental to all aspects of the treaty making and truth telling process. It is fundamental to all aspects of establishing, selecting officers, and running the Treaty Institute Council, the Advisory Committees, the Treaty Institute Council, the Treaty Institute itself, and the Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry. Consultation, information, and communication flows are equally fundamental to generating a sense of belief, trust and confidence in those who will be responsible for taking the processes forward.

Having made my concerns known I now simply ask your committee to closely examine what media, information and communication strategies will underpin both the Path to Treaty and Truth-telling.

It is not for me to develop such a strategy but some things are just so obvious:

- There are numerous opportunities through Murri Country regional and national radio along with multiple opportunities in the social media space – how will these be used and, out of interest, have they been used in the processes to date?
- There are approximately 150 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language groups in Queensland – what materials will be developed for them and in what languages?
- There are 77 local council areas within Queensland and most, if not all, will have RAPs – will they be encouraged to incorporate responses to truth telling and treaty?
- There are approximately 200 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Health related services in Queensland – how will they be utilised?
- There are numerous Native title representative bodies and service providers including bodies such as the Iman Wardingarri Aboriginal Corporation. Again, how will they be utilised and informed?

As stated, it is not my intention to develop a media, information, communication strategy but it should have been, and certainly should be, an integral foundation in moving forward. I believe if this fails it will have serious consequences for the path ahead.

I conclude by noting that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations and Communities haven been on the lands that are now called Queensland for thousands of years, time immemorial. The fundamentals of this current process are time, respect, genuine consultation, timely communication, and tailored information. Respecting culture and the life realities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples means that this process cannot be rushed. It cannot be at the dictate of a Parliament, or a committee schedule that only allows two hours in Rockhampton and even less in Woorabinda.

Yours

Ross Daniels

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