



RECEIVED

27 MAY 2003
LEGAL, CONSTITUTIONAL AND
ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW
COMMITTEE

Desley Boyle MP
Member for Cairns

No 41

Office 1 "McLeod South"
78-84 Spence Street
P O Box 1259 Cairns 4870

Ph: (07) 40 51 28 68
Fax: (07) 40 51 67 60
cairns@parliament.qld.gov.au

26 May, 2003

Ms Karen Struthers MP
Chair
Legal Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee
Queensland Parliament

Dear Ms Struthers,

Further to the Committee's public hearing in Cairns in regard to the enquiry into representation by Indigenous people in the Queensland Parliament, I offer my submission on this topic.

Yours sincerely,

Desley Boyle MP
Member for Cairns

Submission to the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative
Review Committee re Indigenous representation in Parliament of
Queensland.

Desley Boyle, Member for Cairns

26 May, 2003

The Committee may be aware that the Far North Queensland region boasts the greatest number of Indigenous people of any region in Queensland. One-third of Indigenous people live in our area and we are proud of that. However this means that there is a lot of Indigenous-related business going on, not only in Cairns but also right around the region - and more than there probably is going on in other parts of Queensland.

I think that is part of why many Indigenous organisations did not attend the public hearing in Cairns. They are all flat out with the work already on their desks. There are routinely asked to make submissions about various policy areas to governments at all level. They are working so hard to forward the reconciliation process and to get the issues of concern to Indigenous people dealt with - issues that have never been dealt with before.

Nonetheless while they may be very busy, this is actually good news in that many of these organizations have developed expertise and standing in the community and they are having an impact on positive opportunities for Indigenous people.

Where I really see that impact is when I go out to my high schools and see how many kids of Indigenous background are really "starring" these days. We do not even point to them and say, "Isn't that good? - that is an Indigenous child doing really well." These excellent young people are just in the thick of it and they are scoring OP1s and OP2s like anyone else.

I think that this generation of young people is really going to produce the Indigenous leaders of whatever level of government at an elected level. So, in terms of outcomes to the Committee's enquiry, this is probably where we would do best to put our efforts.

Nonetheless, I think that a couple of things are really limiting progress of Indigenous people in our region and if they are limiting in our area, they probably would be in other areas of Queensland as well. One of these is confidence. To be the only Indigenous person in a room and to get up and to tackle issues and have the confidence to do that - to speak in public - is really hard.

I remember when, at the start of my political career, I was the only woman on a number of Boards. When you are the only one of a group, the only Indigenous person to represent indigenous people, it just does not work. You need numbers of people from the group.

So that is why I would not support creating an Indigenous seat in Parliament. It would not work and in any case, Indigenous people are too varied. In the Manoora and Mooroobool areas in Cairns, we have got a large concentration of Indigenous people. However, when you look more closely, you find that they are massively diverse in their backgrounds. Some are Torres Strait Islanders, some are Aboriginal people, some are Cook Islanders, and some are South Sea Islanders. There are all kinds of blends. Then on top of that, there are all the family stories, particularly regarding Aboriginal people. It is very complicated. So we must not be naive in thinking that an Indigenous person can have one seat, even for a region, and that this would be fair representation.

I have a bias towards local government as a starting ground in politics, because that is where I started. A few years ago I had been supportive of an Indigenous lady who was very well known in Cairns and stood for the Cairns City Council in one of the divisions.

Her experience, which we should be mindful of, is that neither all Indigenous people nor all women voted for her. There were a lot of different feelings within her division - about her policies and her attitudes. So we must not assume that Indigenous people are necessarily all going to get together in that way. Of course they will not. They are too diverse and there are too many issues.

What I have to say, too - and I do not like saying it, but I think that it is a fact - is that there is still a lot of prejudice in this country. There are a lot of shameful things said that are generalisations about and that stereotype Indigenous people. I think that all of us still has work to do, though most especially governments, towards breaking down some of the irrational and unreasonable discriminatory beliefs that exist in regards to Indigenous people. Unless these are broken down, Indigenous people are not going to get a fair vote and a fair chance, even if they do put in the hard yards and raise the money and put up their hands for election.

So far as this enquiry is concerned I support the suggestions made by Indigenous people at the public hearing in Cairns for mentoring programs. I also recommend that traineeships targeting young Indigenous people be considered. For example, I would like to see our government specify that traineeships

be made available in offices where the trainees will learn about how government is conducted e.g. in electorate offices, at the Electoral Commission, at Parliament House in its various departments.

Familiarity with political parties and their direct activities is one thing but it is not enough. Right across the business of electing governments we need to deliberately encourage Indigenous young people by saying, "If you are interested in social and political matters, we can give you a suitable traineeship."

While the traineeships might not lead immediately to the trainees standing for elected office, it would extend knowledge about our system of government and develop confidence in a growing number of Indigenous young people. So, maybe somewhat later in life, when their chances come, or when they feel strongly, politically, about land issues or whatever, they will have the knowledge and skills to take up the challenge.

My congratulations to the Committee for taking up this important issue and encouraging public consideration of it. I hope time will demonstrate that Cairns and the Far North region will be at the forefront of Indigenous representation in the Queensland Parliament.