



Speech by

DESLEY BOYLE

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

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NATIVE TITLE (QUEENSLAND) STATE PROVISIONS AMENDMENT BILL (No. 2)

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (9.13 p.m.): It is a special privilege for me to be a member of the Beattie Government introducing this native title legislation to the Parliament of Queensland. The decisions to at last give the indigenous people of our nation recognition, first of their pre-European existence and second of their strong cultural connection to the land, have been historic social and legislative events of this decade in Australia.

There are few, if any, Australians who argue the intention behind the associated legislation. However, there are many Australians who have been dismayed, frustrated and, as time has passed, increasingly critical of the stalemate that has arisen in implementing the Commonwealth's native title legislation. The responsibility for this stalemate falls at the feet of Prime Minister Howard and his coalition Government. Unable to act decisively to resolve this stalemate, the Howard Government has shuffled much of the responsibility to the States.

The former Premier of Queensland, the honourable member for Surfers Paradise, was not up to the job. What a career for the member for Surfers Paradise—to rise to the position of "Mr Premier", then to "Mr Indecisive", then to "Mr Negative". Then the people of this State judged him "Mr Not Up To The Job". But Premier Peter Beattie has wasted no time in proving that he is up to the job. He has carried out his commitment to resolve the stalemate and thereby to address the division created by miners, pastoralists and indigenous groups and within the broader community.

The Premier and his advisers and staff on this project have consulted, considered, drafted and consulted again. Now, with the unanimous support of the Labor members of this House, he presents a practical, fair and sensible solution that supports agreements and forces action within a reasonable period of time by any party involved in a particular proposal, whether mining companies or indigenous groups. It prevents either party being deliberately obstructive. It prevents unnecessary prolongation.

The model behind this Bill is in its essence a model for managing disputes, not only in law but also in many other fields of human endeavour where differences may arise. The principle is equitable opportunity to negotiate a joint solution with the use of external power to oversee fair process and timely progress. Understandably, therefore, parties with extreme views are not happy with this legislation. Neither the mining council nor some indigenous groups are happy, and that is because they did not get it all their own way. Nonetheless, their criticisms of this Bill have not drawn widespread attention across the broader community. In a real sense, that is proof that this Bill is fair, is down the middle and does consider all interests, though it does not concede control to either business or indigenous groups. It will bring, with force if necessary, resolution within a reasonable period of time.

The region of Cairns and the far north is home to one-third of Queensland's indigenous people. We are also host to large mining companies and home to miners and their families. Cairns, as the city for the region, recognises the rights of indigenous people and the important socioeconomic contribution of their culture to the future of Cairns. Similarly, Cairns recognises the value of the mining industry, large and small, to the region and the importance to the individuals and families of the jobs that flow from it.

What the Cairns community does not want is what we have had under the previous Government—business bogged down, even turned away, and indigenous people ignored and their historical bonds and future choices brushed aside while only lawyers prosper and picnic. What the broader community of Cairns does want is not one group to win and one to lose. It wants resolution. It

wants to feel secure that indigenous people are given a fair go while at the same time business is welcomed and given the go-ahead, so long as projects demonstrate social benefits and quality environmental management. It wants business to create jobs, to make profits and thereby to engender prosperity in which we can all share. It wants native title issues sorted out and off the agenda so that we can move forward.

That is what this Bill does. It balances mining and indigenous interests, it resolves disputes fairly, it ensures timely action and it moves us on. It will, if passed by this House, be another major step by the Beattie Government in resolving native title issues and thereby taking them off the agenda. This Bill is a practical, fair and sensible solution and I am proud to commend it to the House.