



Speech by

**Hon. JUDY SPENCE**

**MEMBER FOR MOUNT GRAVATT**

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Hansard 18 September 1998

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

**Aboriginal Reconciliation Strategy**

**Hon. J. C. SPENCE** (Mount Gravatt— ALP) (Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Women's Policy and Minister for Fair Trading) (9.41 a.m.), by leave: I am pleased to report that the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development is working on coordinating a whole-of-Government reconciliation strategy. Other State Governments have actively participated in the reconciliation process in recent years. In fact, in New South Wales this week, the Premier, Mr Carr, and the Opposition Leader, Mr Collins, signed a bipartisan statement reaffirming their commitment to the delivery of programs and services to Aboriginal people when Aborigines sat in Australia's second only black Parliament.

The former coalition Government did little to foster reconciliation in Queensland. Nevertheless, the process has advanced in this State due to the voluntary efforts of many ordinary Queenslanders. I would like to particularly acknowledge the work being performed by our State Reconciliation Council which, in difficult political circumstances, has managed to undertake successful strategies throughout the State. There is much that Government can do to assist local councils and community groups promote reconciliation. My department recently financed a highly successful reconciliation conference in Mackay.

It is difficult, though, to promote reconciliation in a political climate that gives credence to intolerance. This week the Parliament has heard repeated assertions by One Nation members, particularly the member for Tablelands, that neither he nor his party is racist. Despite the member for Tablelands' assertion this week that One Nation does not have a racist policy, one does not need to strain one's eyes reading between the lines of the party's rhetoric to find a message of bigotry.

Since her election in 1996, the member for Oxley has sought to reinvent herself, backing away from her early appalling statements such as her admission that she would not fight for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in her electorate. But a glance at the speech that the member for Oxley gave in Longreach last week leaves no doubt that her message has not changed. In that speech, the member for Oxley repeatedly insinuated that Aboriginal people identified as Aboriginal only because they saw a buck in it. That is one of the most insulting, contemptuous notions ever raised by an Australian politician. Ms Hanson implies that the Aboriginal population of this country has grown more rapidly than the non-indigenous population because identifying as Aboriginal allows people to draw from a bottomless well of cash and freebies—a package of special benefits that exists only in the minds of the member for Oxley and her cohorts. How can it not be racist to insinuate that Aborigines are a greedy, avaricious race of people who gleefully dip into the public purse at the expense of other Australians? The One Nation rhetoric is riddled with racist fantasies.

**Mr Nelson** interjected.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Tablelands will cease interjecting.

**Ms SPENCE:** What needs to be done in this place is a constant dismantling of these myths. So many of the myths promoted by the One Nation Party should be understood to be and clearly identified as racist. Take the member for Tablelands' claim in this Parliament that "white man is burying these people with money". The fact is that many specifically indigenous programs are a substitute for, not a duplication of, programs provided as a matter of course to the rest of the community. We are talking about everyday services taken for granted by Queenslanders— power, clean water and sewerage

systems, for instance—services that this Government is proud to be providing because historically they have been denied to many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote communities.

The member for Tablelands recently stated in this Parliament that if we go to Mareeba we will see "Aboriginal children lying drunk in the gutter". He has done a great disservice to the indigenous members of his electorate.

**Mr NELSON:** I rise to a point of order. The Minister is misleading the House. I did not say that in Parliament.

**Mr SPEAKER:** There is no point of order. The member will resume his seat.

**Ms SPENCE:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am quoting from Hansard. The member for Tablelands has done a great disservice to the indigenous members of his electorate and those community and Government-based organisations working to improve the living conditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by these remarks, which are undoubtedly racist. Mr Nelson's remarks are in stark contrast to those made by Councillor Linda Rudd, a member of the Mareeba Alcohol Action Group, who says that she has never seen drunken Aboriginal children in the streets of Mareeba. Why is it that only Mr Nelson is aware of these issues when the local council is not?

The fact is that in comparison with non-indigenous people, a large proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do not drink alcohol at all and in many communities councils have introduced by-laws to restrict or inhibit the sale of alcohol in their community. The National Drug Strategy survey found that 33% of the indigenous population were regular drinkers compared to 45% of the general population. Stereotyping Aboriginal people as drunks is singling out one race of people in a negative way, and that is racist.

There is no denial that alcohol and drug abuse are major problems which undermine community cohesion in some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. There are many effective programs operating within indigenous communities in Queensland, and I am proud to say that my Government—my department—gives financial support to these programs to address these issues and reduce drug and alcohol abuse. Financial support to indigenous communities for infrastructure, for health, housing, education and social welfare is a core business of Government, because these communities are hugely disadvantaged. To deny indigenous people access to basic services that the rest of Queensland takes for granted is racist.

Last week in Longreach, Ms Hanson again advocated the repeal of the race power clause in section 51 of the Constitution—the clause that gives indigenous people the right to equitable treatment as citizens of this country. The member for Oxley now argues that the 90% of Australians who voted for social justice for indigenous Australians in 1967 did not understand the implications of their vote and would vote differently if given the opportunity to do so again. With the opening of the Olympic Games in Sydney just two years away, we should be prouder than ever of the achievements of our indigenous citizens.

Tourism is essential to the Queensland economy. Part of the attraction for overseas tourists is our rich indigenous heritage and culture. Many people visiting our State before, during and after the Games will be keen to pay for an indigenous Australian experience. A recent study by the Australia Council concluded that indigenous arts and culture are worth \$220m to this country. Official data from the International Visitor Survey gives another glimpse of the importance of this industry: 43% of German tourists and more than one third of tourists from the rest of Europe visited an Aboriginal site or cultural display. Other research has found that many tourists from abroad complained that there were too few Aboriginal attractions to satisfy their interest.

This Government is proud to boast of spending more than \$100m on a department responsible for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy and development. With an eye to the Olympics, officers from my department are now preparing to ensure that Queensland's indigenous culture is showcased for the world in the year 2000. Their task will be made difficult if public figures such as the member for Tablelands continue to use this place to spout racist rhetoric. However, all is not lost for the member for Tablelands; he will have ample opportunity to redeem himself when responding to the initiatives of this Government. I eagerly await the non-racist One Nation Party's warm support for our reconciliation and anti-racist strategy.

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