



Speech by

MIKE REYNOLDS

MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

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

Mr REYNOLDS (Townsville—ALP) (5.07 p.m.): Today it is with a great deal of pleasure that I rise in the House to speak in favour of the Native Title (Queensland) State Provisions Amendment Bill (No. 2). The key objective of the Bill has been recognised as implementing Stage 2 of the Premier's native title strategy by providing for the establishment of a simple, straightforward and workable mechanism to deal with future acts in respect of mining that might affect native title.

A little while ago I heard the honourable member for Toowoomba South speaking about hypocrisy. What hypocrisy and expertise in hypocrisy we have heard today from the Opposition Leader, the Leader of the Liberal Party and the member for Toowoomba South! Once again we have heard remarks from them that are of a divisive nature. It does not surprise us that their remarks are divisive, because we had two and a half years of a Borbidge Government which adopted a divisive and unsuccessful approach to native title. What did that get us? It got us nought in terms of mining projects in this State, in terms of the relationship that any Government should have with indigenous people, and in terms of our stature as a State Government across Australia. The Borbidge Government's record is that of a disgraceful and divisive Government that was opposed to the rights of indigenous Queenslanders.

This Bill before the House today is about a fair and equitable system of native title in the State of Queensland. This is the second stage of the legislation to be introduced. The August legislation was the first stage of the legislation to be introduced by the Beattie Government. As has been indicated by my fellow speakers on the Government side today, there is a need for an honourable balance. That term "honourable balance" is not understood by the Leader of the Opposition and by other Opposition members who have spoken today. This is about an honourable balance—an honourable balance in regard to the rights of the different stakeholders who have sat around the table with the Government for the past two months.

I would like to reflect back to where native title actually started. I happen to have been a friend and a colleague of Eddie Koiki Mabo, a resident of Townsville throughout the eighties when I was mayor of the city. I know that Eddie Mabo went to James Cook University; he was a person working there. In his hour of lunchtime, he went and studied up on native title in other countries. Of course, it is an Australian historic record now that the "Mabo lead" was taken by Eddie Mabo. Let us remember that that lead came from an indigenous person. It did not come from the Governments of Australia either at a State or Federal level; it came from a member of the indigenous community. That was a hard-fought right by Koiki Eddie Mabo which ended up in the High Court of Australia giving the lead from the High Court—not from the Government, but from the High Court. It is a shame that that declaration from the High Court came after Eddie Mabo died. It was a long and a hard fight for indigenous rights. We first of all saw from that High Court judgment in the Mabo decision a recognition of indigenous native title rights. We then saw in the Wik judgment a further recognition of native title rights in Australia.

I think some of us forget that it has been 210 years since European settlement in this country. We can look back over those 210 years I think with a fair amount of shame in regard to what was not done for indigenous people in this State. We have seen over the past 30 years—and I am going to go on with this in my speech today—some recognition in an incremental way. For 210 years since that European settlement in Australia, we have seen only incremental advances made.

As a member of this House, I listened to the statement of the Leader of the Opposition today that he believes that indigenous people's rights and privileges should be the same as those of the pastoralists. What a joke and what gross hypocrisy that we have heard from the Leader of the Opposition today! If we look at the social indicators that relate to both indigenous and non-indigenous people, we see that indigenous people—and it does not matter what social indicator we look at—are at the bottom rung of every social indicator. I challenge honourable members to tell me one in which they are higher than the bottom rung.

If we look at housing, education, imprisonment, employment, unemployment or health, or if we look at any other social indicator, we see that indigenous people are on the bottom rung.

Mr Nelson interjected.

Mr REYNOLDS: So much for the derision that I am hearing from the One Nation members on my right!

Mr Nelson: You're going to hear a lot more.

Mr REYNOLDS: I am sure I will. I will tell honourable members something. All we hear from the right-hand side of this House from where I am sitting is the inherent racism of their remarks. It is the inherent racism of the One Nation Party's remarks.

Let me say that, as a person representing my electorate in north Queensland, as a person who regularly goes to indigenous communities and as a person who in the last week and a half has been to Palm Island and Yarrabah and listened to indigenous people and their concerns, I can tell honourable members that native title is high in their priority of concerns. In stark contrast to the Opposition's shameless attack in this House today, the Beattie Government has been about consultation. We have had genuine consultation with the Queensland Mining Council, the Queensland Indigenous Working Group, the pastoralists and others who have been concerned with this Bill before the House today. It is fair enough to say that that has been a very difficult period of negotiation. Full marks should go to the Premier and his negotiating team for the work that they have done in putting this native title Bill before the House today.

Let us compare it again with my experience with the Borbidge National/Liberal Party Government which was in power in this House for two and a half years. I want to go back to Easter 1996, when I was Chairman of the Townsville Port Authority. We have heard a lot today from the Opposition members in regard to the Century Zinc project. Let us hear some reality in regard to where they were there. Their attempts to resuscitate and get the Century Zinc project going were scurrilous and scandalous. We saw that, when native title holders wanted to come and negotiate with the Government or wanted to come and negotiate with me as Chairman of the Townsville Port Authority, the Borbidge Government put every wall or divider in the way of that negotiation occurring.

In Easter 1996, as Chairman of the Townsville Port Authority, I wrote to the then Premier, and let me place this on the public record. I wrote to the then Premier with a request that I had been given by all of the native title holders around the Century Zinc project. They wanted me to go to Doomadgee to talk to them about the Townsville port and the role that it could have had in the Century Zinc project. It is a matter of public record that the then Premier wrote back within a few hours of my request to go to Doomadgee and said, "No, we don't agree with negotiation and we don't want you to go." The then Premier was not about negotiation; he was about a bombastic, divisive attitude when it came to native title and negotiating with indigenous people.

That is just one example of his attitude towards negotiation and consultation with indigenous people. His approach was about scaremongering. We heard about that scaremongering for two and a half years; it did nothing. It got 11 One Nation members elected, but it did nothing for the Borbidge Government, and I believe it will do nothing for the Opposition or One Nation, either. That approach was bombastic and demeaning. It was an approach that was inherently racist. We have heard that bombastic, demeaning and scaremongering approach once again from the Opposition Leader, who I see has sought to join us in the House once again today.

In regard to the mining industry, this Native Title Act embodies a compromise of interests. I believe that the Carpentaria and Mount Isa minerals province, with which I have had a reasonable amount to do as the past chairman of the port authority where much of this product is going, has a huge amount of potential. The mining industry will be able to work within the framework of this legislation. The right to negotiate has been modified and I believe that the Premier has successfully negotiated a piece of legislation that will serve the interests of both indigenous and non-indigenous Queenslanders into the new millennium. It will be an end to the divisive, ugly attacks on indigenous people which were perpetrated by the Borbidge administration and further carried out by the Opposition Leader in his disgraceful attacks on indigenous people in this House today. That to me is a disgraceful situation that has been going on for the past three years. He knows little about it; he cannot even recognise his own attacks.

I grew up in north Queensland. I had about 48 years' association with that north Queensland area. I recognise that the referendum passed by the Australian people in 1967 was a recognition for the first time—and I am talking about 31 years ago—in a 210-year history that the rights of indigenous people in Australia were recognised in any way, shape or form by any Government. In the early seventies, after that 1967 referendum, we saw the achievements of the early days of the Whitlam Government—the setting-up of Aboriginal health services and the establishment of Aboriginal legal services. That was the start of a massive injection of funds into indigenous communities in terms of the very important work that is required.

Is the very true nature of One Nation not coming out today? Does it really not rankle the One Nation members here today that we are actually talking about indigenous rights? We are talking about the 210 years that indigenous people have been trodden on in Australia. Does it not rankle the One Nation members in a very impressive way today?

Twenty-five years ago in Townsville, where I live, one hardly saw a black person in any fair dinkum or genuine employment. The last 25 years have made a tremendous difference to indigenous people in this nation because at last, after decades of shame, it has been recognised that their purpose and role should be one of partnership with the non-indigenous people of Australia. I feel very proud of the 25 years of progress that we have seen under State and Federal Governments, and under the Federal Government of Malcolm Fraser. This disgraceful exhibition today by One Nation shows its true nature.

Mr Dalglish interjected.

Mr REYNOLDS: The member for Hervey Bay has rarely interjected in this House. He is interjecting today. The true nature of One Nation is really coming out today—its inherent racism and its bombastic, divisive attitude. One Nation members cannot help themselves. We knew that when it came to the native title legislation One Nation members would all interject because their true nature would come out. It is very impressive. I thank them very much.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr D'Arcy): Order! This is getting out of hand. I suggest the honourable member address the Chair and that interjections cease.

Mr REYNOLDS: The Bill before the House today is a fair and honourable outcome for all stakeholders. It recognises that native title is an intrinsic right of indigenous people—a right that has been recognised by the High Court of this land. Importantly, it recognises that the true nature of reconciliation must also embody native title rights. That is the fair dinkum approach to reconciliation. This Bill is pragmatic in its nature in that it also recognises the rights of the mining industry and modifies the right to negotiate.

None of the stakeholders today could say that they are completely happy, but I believe the Bill before the House exemplifies the leadership of the Premier in negotiating a fair, honourable and equitable outcome. It recognises the inclusive nature of the Beattie Government—a Government which is determined to protect indigenous rights, a Government keen to encourage mining development in Queensland, a Government keen to provide jobs for all Queenslanders and a Government determined to ensure that social justice is achieved for indigenous Queenslanders. I commend Premier Beattie on his leadership on this issue and I commend the Bill to the House.
