



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

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NATIVE TITLE (QUEENSLAND) STATE PROVISIONS BILL

Mr NELSON (Tablelands—ONP) (11.53 a.m.): I rise to speak to this Bill because it is incredibly important to my electorate. We have seen a lot of things emerge in relation to this issue, such as a claim on the Malanda Falls—I do not know whether anybody is familiar with that area; some of the members from north Queensland might be—a claim on Lake Tinaroo and a claim on the shire reserves around Mareeba Shire. These claims have gone on and on ever since One Nation was elected to represent the Tablelands electorate.

This is a big issue because it is at the heart of the problem facing this country, that is, the division between different groups in our community. I am standing here and saying honestly: all I want is equality. Once when I was living in Canberra one of my friends said to me, "Equal rights, not extra rights". To me, it is pretty simple. Nelson Mandela also argues for equality. He says that we should all be the same—we should look for equality—so that we have access to the same laws, we have the same rights of representation and, when it comes to access to title of land, we have the same rights.

I believe that those guys opposite are going to mount the argument that we should not treat unequals equally. I will not go into it except to say that I find that discriminatory. Those members are trying to say that Aboriginal people are unequal to us. Another statement that has been made recently by a member opposite—which relates to the big issues on which One Nation is continually attacked—is that the number of Victorians migrating north is going to affect employment in Queensland. I thought, "Wait a minute. Hold on. One Nation is getting caned for saying that immigration is going to affect employment and the member is saying that migration will, too."

If members believe the figures that have been given to me by ATSIC, 28% of my electorate is Aboriginal. So native title is a big issue in my electorate. An Aboriginal lady came to see me—and as a personal favour to her I will not name her—about the Malanda Falls issue. She said, "Shaun, I didn't want that claim. It has caused trouble for me in the community." I might add that this lady is a very well-respected member of my local community, which is a very small community of about 800 people. She said, "That claim has caused untold trouble in the community." This claim had nothing to do with me; I was not in Parliament at the time it was made. However, we are seeing divisions in the community over the claims that have been made. Sometimes those claims are made by people other than the members of the community to which they relate. That is causing trouble, strife and mayhem.

Call me crazy, but I call on everyone to think, "Wait a minute. What if we all got together and said, 'Let's be Australians. Let's all have one law.'" Again I might be called crazy for saying this, but maybe we could have a Bill of Rights such as that which exists in the United States that gives the citizens of the country equal access to laws regardless of race, colour or creed. I do not see a problem with that. If somebody came to me and said, "I want to have access to this land because I am an Australian citizen", I would say, "Fine, off you go." However, to have access to land because one is an Aboriginal Australian, I find offensive.

I had a discussion with a member opposite about cultural diversity. I understand that we all come from different places and we all have different backgrounds. That is a good thing. The Aboriginal people have a culture different from mine. It would be ridiculous for me to say that they do not. However, we are Australians now. It has been 200 years since colonisation. Whether that colonisation was good or bad, it was not my decision; it was a British Government decision and a colonial decision.

Therefore, let us move past that. Let us say, "Today, in 1998, we are Australians. We have to acknowledge that, yes, there are injustices in our past." There are injustices in everyone's past. For example, today the Irish people are still suffering injustices at the hands of the British Government.

Mr Lucas interjected.

Mr NELSON: I am just saying that everyone can point to an issue in their past where they have been grievously mistreated. I do not think that there is a single person on the planet who has not been grievously mistreated.

Mr Lucas interjected.

Mr NELSON: I thank the member very much for that compliment. However, the simple fact is that native title and all of the surrounding issues are getting us nowhere. I walk down the main street of Mareeba and I see Aboriginal people who have received no benefit whatsoever from the massive amounts of money that have been spent on ATSIC or on Aboriginal relations in this country. It is a shame that the member for Cook is not present in the Chamber. I visit the regional communities about which he speaks, such as Kowanyama, Aurukun and Karumba. I see no benefit from the money that is being spent on ATSIC in those places—no benefit whatsoever. Recently, an Aboriginal elder from the Mareeba community came into my office. He was very, very scared to do so because of the repercussions that he would suffer. However, I encouraged him to stand up for himself and tell me the details of his problems. When he did so, it became apparent that this man is a very good man who has the interests of his people at heart.

Mr Lucas: That's patronising.

Mr NELSON: It is not a patronising statement. He is trying his hardest to do something good for his community in Mareeba and he is being stopped because his community is being hijacked by groups from another community. I have raised this matter with the Minister and I am still awaiting a response. It all boils down to one central point. If anyone on the Government side of the House can explain it to me, I invite them to do so.

Mr Pearce: You wouldn't listen.

Mr NELSON: I would love to listen. The difference between the member for Fitzroy and me is that I would like to hear what he has to say. I ask him to please explain it to me so that I can understand. Better still, he should come up to the tablelands some time and explain it to the hundreds of people who come to me and say, "Shaun, what the hell is going on? What am I supposed to do with these spurious claims over Lake Tinaroo?" It was not even around before settlement; it was made by a dam.

Mr Lucas: What about the land it was built on?

Mr NELSON: What about the land it was built on? There is a lake there now. Good lord!

Mr Lucas: How about we come and talk to you about Heiner? Has anybody talked to you about that?

Mr NELSON: The simple fact is that this is a big issue. It is good to see that the Government is attacking it and doing something with it. I encourage anything about native title that will work. There is more to be done, but I think we are moving away from the main point. Especially in the current crisis, with the Australian dollar at an all-time low, we need to start looking at our inner strength and at unifying this nation, which is something native title will never do.

As I said in a speech in this place on another occasion, something those in Government cannot understand is that some people in this State—about 438,000—do not agree with them. When a person comes to me and says, "I voted Labor and I think this, that and the other", I do not say, "Look, I don't care what you think. Get out of my office." I say, "This is what I think." We have a meaningful discussion and we come to some sort of arrangement.

I ask, on behalf of every single person in Queensland who gave their primary vote to One Nation, that Labor just think for a moment. Is native title working? Will it solve the problems we have in this State? Will it make us a unified and cohesive place in which we can move into the future with a feeling of being Australians and Queenslanders, first and foremost? Our cultural differences are a wonderful thing, but they should not stop us from being primarily Australians and Queenslanders. When we can work together and be one—with equal rights, not extra rights—then just maybe we can start to solve some of the problems, such as our crashing dollar.

All I ask is that Labor members just hear what the people who voted for the 11 One Nation members have to say. Honourable members should remember that six of those seats were previously held by Labor Party members.

Mr Lucas: What about Heiner? Do you support it?

Mr NELSON: The honourable member keeps bringing that up. Why? Does he want that issue to keep coming up in this Parliament? We said here today that we do not want that subject brought up

any more, yet he is bringing it up. What does he want? Here I am, trying to talk about an issues concerning my electorate, trying to raise a legitimate concern and trying reasonably to discuss an issue, and I am being verballed by the member for Lytton.

Mr Borbidge: He can't help it; he's a Labor Lawyer.

Mr NELSON: Well, there you go. I say to the member for Lytton: I will come to the main street of Lytton, wherever that is, and go for a walk with him. Then we will see how many Aboriginal children lying drunk in the gutter we stumble over. We will see how many Aboriginal children are standing outside pubs waiting for their parents to come out. I will take you to the main street of Mareeba, where all of your money is supposed to be being spent.

Mr Pearce: You're sick.

Mr NELSON: I am not sick. This is a fact. Come to Mareeba and see for yourself. Maybe in Fitzroy there are towns that are suffering the same problem. The Aboriginal people are coming to me with these problems.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr D'Arcy): Order! I suggest to the honourable member that he address the Chair.

Mr NELSON: Mr Deputy Speaker, the Aboriginal people are saying to me, "We have these problems and the money the Government is trying to bury us with is not helping." The Government is spending that money, as the member for Crows Nest said, to get a lovely feeling about itself. Government members do not have to walk down the street and deal with the problem. They spend that money in order to say, "We are wonderful because we are spending all this money."

In truth, the money is not going to the people who need it. Those people are still suffering. Nothing is being done. White man is burying these people with money and hoping that the problem will eventually go away. Maybe one day it will, because those people will not be alive. They will not be alive because the money did not get to them, it did not help and it did not solve the problem. If Labor Party members do not believe me, they should go to areas such as Aurukun, Kowanyama and the Kimberleys and have a look. I have and I do not understand where all that money is going. Government members should tell me where it helped. It does not help.

Dr Clark: We want to hear some constructive suggestions.

Mr NELSON: I will give them to the member for Barron River. I suggest that we start addressing the concerns of Aboriginal people. They come to us and say, "Look, we do not want all this money poured onto us." Would it not be better spent in constructing areas—instead of spending the massive amounts we do in programs to build these communities up——

Ms Struthers: You want missions?

Mr NELSON: No, we do not want missions! I am sure that if the member for Archerfield went to the Aboriginal people, she would find out that they do not want missions either. I will give the House one really good example of the concerns being brought to me by the Aboriginal people in my community. They said, "Instead of building us a three-bedroom brick house, why not build us a useful shelter that we can use?" I am trying to explain it how it was explained to me. It is very difficult, because their terms of reference are different from mine. A representative of the group said, "A three-bedroom house being built in an area that keeps us on the outskirts of town does not work. We don't like it like that. We don't want it running like that. Instead of giving the money to us, educate us on how to use that money first. Don't just give us lumps of dollars and tell us when, where, how and why to spend it. Actually educate us how we can better our communities." I am not saying that I have the answers.

Mr Lucas: That's painfully obvious.

Mr NELSON: Exactly. I am not saying that I have the answers. I am only trying to highlight the problem. I ask Labor members to tell me why, if the money is going to the correct place, after all these years of spending by Government and ATSIC we still have these problems.

It seems to me that every time a member of the Left wants to get a good news bite he goes out to one of these communities and says how terrible it is to see that people are living like this. But nothing ever happens, so in a few years' time he can go back out to that community and say, "Look how terrible this community is." Again, nothing happens.

Mr Fouras: What should happen?

Mr NELSON: We should stop treating these people as unequals, we should stop saying that treating them equally would be bad and we should welcome them into our society and make them what they desperately want to be, that is, Australians.
