



Speech by

DESLEY BOYLE

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

Hansard 26 May 1999

STOLEN GENERATION

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (4.10 p.m.): I pay my respects to the traditional owners of the land on which this building now stands and I pay respect to the indigenous people of far-north Queensland and particularly those who live in Cairns. I am proud to say that 10% or thereabouts of the population of the electorate of Cairns are indigenous people, and I hope that they will be proud of the words that I offer today, as I hope will many other thousands of people in Cairns, in support of the motion to say sorry and offer a full apology to the stolen generation.

I first realised the need to say sorry several years ago when I was working on a youth suicide prevention program in Cairns. I was invited to attend a workshop for elders in the Yarrabah community. I found it to be a very moving and important workshop, following as it did some months over which a number of young males in the Yarrabah community had ended their lives. On that day we realised that many of the parents of the young people at Yarrabah felt much hurt and pain and had suffered much harm through their own dislocation and the indignities suffered over generations of abuse perpetrated by the Europeans who invaded their lands. They had no words to express their hurt. As they attempted to express their sadness and anger, they felt overwhelmed. They spoke of the 40 different tribal groups that had been collected at Yarrabah and of having no sense of ownership, healing or even of an ability to express their deep emotions. "Sadness" and "anger" are not strong enough words to describe the feelings that they could not verbalise. It would be true to say that they experienced a feeling of profound generational desperation and hopelessness. That was when I realised that, in order for those people to heal, Cairns and the broader Queensland community needed to join with them. It is only by truly recognising in our own hearts the need for an apology and then saying those words that we can be trusted by the indigenous people of our State to join with them towards reconciliation. Some honourable members on the other side of the House have asked, "What benefit is there in saying the word 'sorry'?" Some have equivocated; they have almost said it, but just refused to say that extra word.

Mr Schwarten: That little word.

Ms BOYLE: It is such a little word and yet such a big word in terms of the honesty that it takes to share it with this House and the people of Queensland. What benefits are there? There are many benefits. People who have been from whatever cause wounded and hurt will heal quicker when their hand is held and when there is a circle of healing around them and people supporting them in their pain. Those of us who have been responsible for mistakes in the past know that it is not until we face those mistakes fully and directly that we can be sure not to make them again and be able to warn others about them. It is not until we build trust that we can truly go forward.

I am amazed at the refusal by members on the other side of this House to say sorry. To an extent, I think that refusal is because of some small-mindedness, meanspiritedness and obstinacy. However, in respect of some honourable members opposite it is worse than that; I think they are refusing to face the enormity of the indignities perpetrated upon a race. They rail against apologising as though if we apologise on this occasion and if we say sorry there will be a flood of apologies to make to all sorts of people who have been hurt. Thereby they betray to us their denial of the enormity of this particular racial abuse and of the need for an apology.

Where do we go in the future? Today is indeed a day of celebration and recognition of the fact that it is amazing that the indigenous people of Queensland have managed to survive. I express my

respect for their strength and courage in having survived up to this point. I certainly wish to put on record my strong wishes for a revival and renewal of Aboriginal culture and spirit, and I hope that this motion, if it is passed a little later this afternoon, will contribute towards that revival and renewal. I make my apology with a sense of privilege that I am in a position at this time to be part of a new and different Queensland in which the European population is truly united on a new path with the indigenous people of Queensland.
