



Speech by

**JEFF KNUTH**

**MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN**

---

Hansard 20 July 1999

**NATIVE TITLE (QUEENSLAND) STATE PROVISIONS AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr KNUTH** (Burdekin—IND) (4.43 p.m.): In 1974, a Labor Party senator by the name of Senator Cavanagh stated at the National Press Club that the Federal Government had bungled the Aboriginal policy. According to one report, the then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Senator Cavanagh, said that the Federal Labor Party had bungled the Aboriginal policy and had altered the whole character of the Australian individual and created areas of hatred. He told the National Press Club that Labor's implementation of this policy in Aboriginal affairs had been one of disaster. We still do not know what is best for Aborigines.

Twenty-six years later, the Labor Party is still bungling Aboriginal affairs. And I believe that this will go on for another 20 years, despite what is being said in this House and despite what is being said by the Government. Where will it all stop? Will the Aborigines, at a later date, sell the areas of land that they have acquired? And in the future will they say that they were diddled out of the right price, and will it all come back to the Australian people? This debate has been raging for 30 years. In common with the member for Crows Nest, I would honestly love to see an end to it, too, but somehow I do not believe that I will.

One aspect that has been left out of this debate is small business and what this is doing to small businesses in rural and regional Queensland. A constituent of mine came into my electorate office the other day. He is setting up barramundi tours in the Burdekin. He spent everything he had to set up that business. It is a great idea. It is promoting jobs in the Burdekin. It will capture the tourists who go through my electorate every year at this time. But what he did not account for was native title. He thought he had everything covered. He put in his submission to the QFMA, but the QFMA has been knocking him around, telling him to do this, telling him to do that. Then suddenly, he has to face a native title search.

I phoned the QFMA and said, "Look, I have already done a native title search. I did it a couple of days ago because of the hut owner's business. I assure you that there is no native title over that area." But the QFMA said, "Oh no, we have to do our own." I said, "Look, I have got all the papers. Why can't we get this over and done with right here today and get this man in business? He is losing jobs. He is knocking back tourists. He has been booked out, but he has to knock all that back because he cannot get the licence he needs."

This sort of thing is happening to hundreds of small businesses throughout Queensland—thousands. I have heard developers say the same thing: they cannot put a road through, they cannot do this, they cannot do that, because it could be under native title or it is rumoured to be under native title. These are the problems that are being created. I do not believe that, when they made their decisions, the Federal Government and the High Court foresaw this.

I do not have the answers. I believe that we should all get together to push something through. I am not saying that Aborigines do not have the right to own land. I am not saying that for one minute. But how far is this going to go? Is it going to drag on for years? Or will it stop after this Bill has been passed? I do not know. However, I do know that it is causing untold pain—a lot of pain. People are perplexed. They do not know where they stand. People in the country areas are hurting the most. I have not heard of any native title issues in relation to metropolitan areas. If there were, I believe that there would be a public outcry, and the Labor Party knows that.

What amazed me was that, at the opening of this Parliament, former Senator Bonner stated that this was his land. Is the day going to come when we see a native title claim over the land on which this Parliament sits? What is going to happen? What will we do then? Will the Labor Party change its views on native title?

**Mr Pearce** interjected.

**Mr KNUTH:** I am sorry, but that is what he stated.

The Labor Party thinks it is very strongly behind native title issues. However, the truth is that the Labor Party got onto these issues because it was losing the blue-collar vote. The blue-collar voters walked away, so the Labor Party took on these minority groups. It is pushing their barrow—"We got the green vote, we got the homosexual vote, and now we have the Aboriginal vote. That should get us into Government."

**Mr Sullivan:** You're the one who wanted a pink bridge.

**Mr KNUTH:** I will do anything to attract tourism in the Burdekin no matter how absurd it might sound to the member. If it means dollars to rural communities, I will push it.

**Mr Sullivan** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Reeves): Order! The member for Chermside! I remind the member for Burdekin to speak through the Chair.

**Mr KNUTH:** I am wasting my breath trying to change the Bill, so I am just going to speak on behalf my constituents. Every time I listen to the blue-collar workers, and every time they hear something about native title, they say, "I am sick of that party I have been supporting all my life." It has been proven that the Labor Party won 37.8% of the vote in Queensland at the last election. It managed to get into Government thanks to One Nation—thanks to Pauline Hanson's ridiculous views, because she did not want to pass preferences to the conservatives. The Labor Party got into Government, but it is not going to happen again.

**Mr Reynolds:** What about the Country Party?

**Mr KNUTH:** What about the Labor Country Party? That is more interesting. I thought they stole my idea.

**Mr Reynolds** interjected.

**Mr KNUTH:** This Bill is just helping the conservative cause. If the Labor Party wants to continue backing this Bill and backing native title it should go ahead because it is simply helping our cause. More and more blue-collar workers keep coming over to us every day. I thank the Labor Party for taking this on. I talked to an Aboriginal person from the Burra-Gubba tribe, which is one of the local tribes in the Burdekin area, and I was told that that tribe has not lodged too many claims. The people feel that, if they are not going to live on the land, why put in a claim. They know the truth. I asked the Aboriginal people, "Has any member of the Labor Party ever invited one of your people into his home?" I was told that they had not. I was told, "We know what they are up to. They are just after our vote." The Aboriginal people have woken up to that. The Aboriginal people are starting to get wind of what is going on. It is not going to last forever.

**Mr Reynolds:** They took five minutes to wake up to you.

**Mr KNUTH:** There goes the member for Townsville. I knew he would butt in sooner or later. Every time the member for Townsville opens his mouth another vote comes our way. The member for Townsville does more backflips than a Seaworld dolphin.

**Mr Reynolds:** They took five minutes to wake up to you, and you know it.

**Mr KNUTH:** I don't think anyone has woken up to me. I have been looking after my electorate as a good member should. I do not necessarily agree with what the member for Tablelands did, but he is standing up for his electorate. I believe any member of this House who stands up strongly for his electorate will be re-elected.

**Mr Mickel:** You voted for him. You were going to raise the standards of Parliament.

**Mr KNUTH:** Did I say that?

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I would remind members who are going to interject that they should do so from their correct seat.

**Mr KNUTH:** As I stated before, the pain that is being caused to small business over this native title issue is causing division in the community. Unfortunately, that division is being pushed back onto the Aboriginal community. I tell people, "Don't blame the Aboriginal people; blame the people who are pushing this. Blame the people who invented this." Henry Reynolds pushed this on Eddie Mabo when he worked at the university. He fed him dreams. I am not speaking through my hat. I happen to be good friends with Eddie Mabo's daughter, Bethel Mabo. Do not tell me that I am talking through my

hat. I know exactly what I am talking about. The truth does not come out in the media. I know that I am speaking the truth about the facts behind the scenes.

**Mr Reynolds:** You just don't know that you are saying it in racist terms.

**Mr KNUTH:** I am not a racist. I would like the member for Townsville to withdraw that statement. I am not going to get him to stand up and do it but I would like him to withdraw it. I am not a racist. From my involvement with my own church and the Aboriginal people who have been with me, people will know that I am not a racist. I have never pushed racist views.

I have stated right from the start that I agree with Aborigines having the right to own land, but where is this going to stop? Who is pushing this agenda? Most of these Aboriginal people do not want land. Certain groups want the land.

Where have Queensland Governments and Queensland people been racially intolerant of Aborigines? Aborigines enjoy some of the best housing in the world. They enjoy social security. They enjoy all the benefits of a white society.

**Mr Reynolds:** You are incredibly naive.

**Mr KNUTH:** I am not naive. Nelson Mandela said himself that Aboriginal people have it very good in this country. They have. Where else in the world does a native race have it so easy? We have given them house after house. We have given them everything they have wanted. They have free medical services.

**Mr Mickel** interjected.

**Mr KNUTH:** Where? They enjoy all the benefits that any person in white society enjoys. They have had it very well. They have never been mistreated. Where is this going to stop? We keep hearing all these minority interest groups saying that Aborigines have it so tough and so hard compared with everybody else. In some circumstances I agree.

I agree that some people will not employ an Aborigine because of his colour. That is wrong. I have employed Aborigines. I employed Aborigines because of their attitude, not their colour. I had some very good Aboriginal employees. One of my employees was a very good mate of mine and he ended up committing suicide. It is a sad story. He went down to Hervey Bay and got in with the wrong bunch and ended up committing suicide. That upset me. I spoke to his mother on Palm Island. I quite often worked on Palm Island. His mother said to me, "Jeff, I never liked whites. That's the truth. But when he was around you he came to his senses and he came back to me and he had a very good attitude to life." We ran out of work. We were doing contract work for the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development at the time. He went down south and the rest is history.

I have heard statements from minority groups that Aborigines are doing it tough. I have just completed a trip to the Northern Territory where I looked at the tourist industry. It is a very well established industry. Aborigines in the Northern Territory are enjoying royalties from various mining groups. They are receiving money from the tourism industry and various uranium mines. I do not have a problem with that.

However, there is something that the Federal Government may have to look into. Sometimes Aborigines are successful in native title claims. We all know that any farmer or grazier who was unemployed and who ran out of money would be put through a means test. Once an Aboriginal tribe wins a claim and is making money, is the tribe going to go through the same means test? Why do taxpayers have to fork out money when Aborigines have suddenly become a financial institution? The Federal Government is going to have to look carefully at this. Aborigines cannot have their cake and eat it, too. We cannot have benefits for white men and separate benefits for Aborigines—

**Mr Reynolds:** You have no understanding of this Bill. You haven't spoken to one clause of the Bill.

**Mr KNUTH:** I spoke to the clauses at the last sitting. I am speaking about some of the facts behind this Bill that are not being talked about. I have the right to speak, and I will speak.

I would like to mention also the issue of hunting in these areas where Aboriginal people are going to claim native title and take ownership of the land. Will the hunting be done by traditional means? Will the hunting be done with a spear and a bark canoe, not with a Savage tinnie and a 40-horsepower Tohatsu and a 303 to shoot dugongs and turtles? These are the things that we have to consider. Aborigines cannot enjoy both sides of the fence. They either want to live in their traditional way and own the land or they want to live the way of white man society, which has benefited them.

In the past, a lot of untruths have been spread about Aborigines being forced off the land. In some cases, yes, they were forced off the land. However, in a lot of cases the Aborigines walked towards what white man had to offer. Unfortunately, in many circumstances it was alcohol, which has been very detrimental to the Aboriginal people. In a lot of instances the Aboriginal people enjoyed what the white man had to offer, so they left the land. Recently, I saw this first-hand when I went to Kakadu.

**Mr Pearce** interjected.

**Mr KNUTH:** That is right. I went to Kakadu. In 1964 an Aboriginal elder—I cannot remember his name—made paintings on rocks. He did that because he wanted to show his people what they were walking away from. They were losing their identity with the land and with the Aboriginal customs and ways, because most of them had walked away from the Kakadu area to work on the big cattle properties. They were more interested in the horses, cattle, stockwhips, jobs and money that they could obtain from the white man. So these people were not pushed off the land. This was the tour guide talking; he knew all the facts and they are backed up by the Aboriginal hall that they have at Kakadu. Those Aboriginal people were not pushed off that land; they wanted to go off that land. No-one forced them off. However, it has been stated that many Aboriginals were forced off the land. In some cases, yes, they were, but not in all cases. That is pretty evident in a lot of the communities around the coast.

**Mr Reynolds:** You need to enrol in a first-year anthropology course at James Cook University. I will give you a reference so you can get in.

**Mr KNUTH:** The member for Townsville seems to know what he is talking about. I would like to hear him talk on the subject one day, if he may. I would not mind that.

Many untruths have been spread about what is happening with Aboriginals. I do not know too many Aboriginals who really want to go back to their traditional ways. However, if they want to, they should have that right. There should be no reason for stopping them. I am very concerned about the push for land grabs. Is it being pushed because Aboriginals wish to go back to the land or is it being pushed for monetary gain? That is what concerns me, because a hell of a lot of people out there in the small business fraternity are suffering because of native title. What about their rights? Is anybody going to cry for those people? I am. I will stand up and I will go on record and say that I back those people who are being pushed aside by native title and back their rights to be able to create jobs and get on with their businesses. I think that I am wasting my breath with the Labor Government.

**Mr Reynolds:** You are just wasting your breath.

**Mr KNUTH:** I agree with the member for Townsville; I am wasting my time, but at least I will be able to go back to my electorate and say that I stood up for small business in Queensland.

---