



Speech by

**Mrs J. SHELDON**

**MEMBER FOR CALOUNDRA**

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Hansard 9 June 1999

**MS J. HUGGINS; MS E. SCOTT**

**Mrs SHELDON** (Caloundra—LP) (11.09 p.m.): On Saturday, 29 May, in an article in the Courier-Mail headed "Day of reckoning for cabbie", Tony Koch highlighted the disgraceful treatment of two Aboriginal women by a Sydney cab driver. These two women were in Sydney waiting for a cab to take them to the airport so that they could return to Brisbane. The cab driver would not accept them in his cab because of their race and colour, and he abused them. I am happy to say that at least some of the people in the queue abused the cab driver back.

The women in question were Jackie Huggins and Evelyn Scott. Jackie is a prominent Aboriginal academic and a member of the Federal Government's Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. Evelyn is the Chairman of the Reconciliation Council and a Human Rights Commissioner. I have nothing other than admiration for both women, whom I know personally. I appointed both to important board and advisory positions when I was the Minister for Women's Affairs. I appointed Jackie Huggins to the Library Board of Queensland, on which she represented the interests of all Queenslanders with distinction. She worked with me to open a library in Cairns, which acted as a training house and communications centre for IT networking into Aboriginal communities. Through this centre, Aboriginal people could find out about their cultural history, which we also put on CD-ROM. Much of Aboriginal history is verbal only, and hence it is important to record this valuable information for generations to come. Workers are trained at the library centre to go out into the communities and show people how to use the network, which is in most community council chambers and in community libraries.

I appointed Evelyn Scott, an eminent woman in her own right, to the Ministerial Women's Advisory Council to provide information and policy advice to me regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues. As a result of this process, the council and I set up a pilot program of self-training and administration involving cultural, family and community workshops run by the women of Palm Island, with Evelyn keeping a watching brief on progress. This was met with much enthusiasm by the Palm Island women. Evelyn and I launched this program in Townsville and travelled to Palm Island to speak to the women and the elders. Self-determination is surely the way forward for Aboriginal people. In general, the guiding light in this process are the women who, with dedication and commitment, are influencing progress.

Queensland and Queenslanders in general are richer for the commitment and wisdom of women such as Jackie Huggins and Evelyn Scott. The ignorance and bigotry they experienced in Sydney is unworthy of every decent Australian. Black and white Australians working together will overcome what at these times may seem insurmountable problems. Division, hatred and apathy will never achieve those ends. I would like to think that never again will two women of such dignity be abused in such a manner as they were in Sydney.

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