



Speech by

Hon. P. BRADDY

MEMBER FOR KEDRON

Hansard 26 May 1999

STOLEN GENERATION

Hon. P. J. BRADDY (Kedron—ALP) (Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations) (4.15 p.m.): I support the motion. One thing of which we in this country are proud is that we are a practical and pragmatic people. We pride ourselves on our recognition of what is real and what can be done. What is amazing for a people who can rightly claim to be practical and pragmatic is how long it has taken us as a nation to recognise the reality of what has occurred in the relationship between the Aboriginal nations of this country and the remaining people of this country. It is important that at least on this occasion in the Queensland Parliament we face up to that and speak the truth, because that will enable us all to get on with our lives.

The member for Tablelands said that saying sorry here will not create any more jobs and will not in any way assist the Aboriginal people of this State and country. He is wrong. Anyone who has a real understanding of what an apology is—of what saying sorry is—knows that with the apology, with that true expression of sorry, comes a determination to do better in the future. That is what we are about here today—recognising the fact that we as a people have moved so far away from true humanity that we need to express an apology and a determination to do better.

I will give the House just a few examples to show how far we were wrong. In my youth, there were very few—although there were a couple—prominent Aboriginal sportspeople in this country. I can always remember a common saying around Queensland at that time about Rugby players. When someone said how good a black player was, someone would say, "Yeah, he's fast, he's a clever player, but he's black so he doesn't have any guts." We see how wrong that defamation was when we look at the prominent Aboriginal Rugby Union, Rugby League and Australian Rules footballers of today.

We have inherited a country in which Aboriginal men and women, when they wanted to join the armed forces during the Second World War, had to either explicitly or implicitly deny their Aboriginal heritage. No Aboriginal person was supposed to join the armed forces, yet they did. They joined and they died in the service of a country which refused even to enrol them and recognise them in the census. They joined and they died, but they had to say expressly that they were not Aboriginal or they had to implicitly reject their own culture and heritage. How disgraceful is that? Those are just two examples of why we historically know we were wrong and why we should say we are sorry.

What do we do when we say we are sorry? We say we are doing better and will continue to do better; that we will continue to provide opportunities for future Cathy Freemans, Noel Pearsons or other Aboriginal citizens who are doing so well; that in future, when a young Aboriginal man or woman wishes to join the armed forces, they can and will be able to join as proud Australians and proud Aboriginal people, and that they can go on to careers in the armed forces.

We are expressing our sorrow in a true way by the encouragement we give to young Aboriginal men and women to join the Queensland Police Service—something that was not really open to them only a few years ago because of the culture of this State. Progress is being made in overcoming racism in our society as more and more Aboriginal men and women progress and star, whether it be in sport, the Police Service, the armed services, in law, in medicine or in the Public Service.

When I first went to university just over 40 years ago, I was stunned when it was pointed out to me that the first Aboriginal student in this country was in one of the classes that I was taking. She was

the first Aboriginal student at a university—a young woman by the name of Margaret Williams. I was shocked because at that time in this country we were castigating the Americans for the way they were treating the Negroes. Yet at that time— and I am talking about 1957—she was the first Aboriginal student. Since then thousands have graduated, which means we are doing better.

We are rejoicing here today that we as a people are doing better, but we should have it on the record in the Parliament of a State where so many Aboriginal people were mistreated in the past that we as a people living in this State went wrong, made many mistakes, mistreated them and often used force to take their land, to take their women and to take their children away from them. It is important to have it on the record that we did those things but that we now recognise it, we are sorry for it and we are truly sorry for it because we are doing something about it together. That is what this motion is about and that is why I support it.
