



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard 19 August 1999

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Native Title

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central— Australian Labor Party) (Premier) (9.37 a.m.), by leave: What was thought impossible just 14 short months ago is now irrefutable fact. Queensland is leading the nation in the recognition and management of native title issues. Queenslanders can now look forward to an orderly, coherent process of recognising native title where it exists and implementing sensible and timely procedures for people to exercise their rights and interests.

What was frozen under the coalition is moving again under my Government. Already this year in Queensland we have witnessed a series of historic agreements which provide clear leadership to the nation on native title. My Government has helped to develop agreements between indigenous communities and land-holders to deliver a new lifesaving club and recreational park to Mackay; the grant of 20 small mining leases in Winton, with more to come; and now, agreement to deliver an \$800m nickel mine to Rockhampton and central Queensland.

Our approach to native title is working. It is consistent with the can-do approach of this Government. Under my Government's approach, negotiations are occurring all over the State to break the Borbidge freeze across a range of issues. If there was any doubt about consultation being the best approach to native title, the gains to Queensland from my agreement-based approach make consultation the clear winner. If Queensland had persevered with the blunt-headed Borbidge approach of confrontation, all these matters would still be in the courts wasting taxpayers' money. There is still much work to be done on native title. I look forward to the Commonwealth Government approving, and the Commonwealth Parliament approving, the three native title Bills that we have passed through this Parliament.

The Commonwealth Native Title Act creates a range of obligations on Governments and citizens to consult with native title holders, claimants or representative bodies when native title rights and interests might be affected by an action of Government, for example, changing Crown land to another tenure, issuing permits for construction or other activity on waterways, or issuing permits to use reserves for other than their original purpose. As I said, that is under the Commonwealth legislation. There is also a backlog of mining lease applications that we have inherited, but we are working through them now. We need to eradicate that backlog and we are moving quickly to do so. There are also separate policy issues, such as cultural heritage, that require updating. We are currently working on that and consulting with the stakeholders. There is a massive amount of work ahead of us, and it is important that the Government has an efficient and effective mechanism to deliver solutions to all these issues.

When the Government consulted on the Queensland Native Title Act, the indigenous community offered a coordinated body—the Queensland Indigenous Working Group—to act as a conduit as we sat down with the mining industry and the pastoral industry. The QIWG, which is what it is called, is made up of representatives from throughout Queensland for each of the eight native title representative bodies, the six ATSIC regions, the Aboriginal Coordinating Council and the Islander Coordinating Council. It will seek to provide a unified indigenous voice on Government policy, just as the Queensland Mining Council or the Farmers Federation do now.

Last Friday I signed a protocol with Terry O'Shane, the chairman of QIWG, for my Government to continue to utilise the QIWG as the principal point of consultation with the indigenous community on these other policy matters. The protocol will provide cost effective and efficient ways to conduct future

Government consultation with the State's indigenous people. The protocol is not legally binding and does not give indigenous representatives any right to veto. It simply ensures that indigenous views will be properly heard and considered when Government makes decisions relating to native title, land management, resources development and cultural heritage—in the same way that the views of miners are put forward by the Mining Council and the views of farmers are put forward by the Farmers Federation.

The end result will be rapid progress towards a clear policy framework through which Queenslanders can go about their business without confusion or unnecessary delay. That means greater certainty. This is all about certainty. I table for the information of the House a copy of the protocol that was signed between the Queensland Government and the Queensland Indigenous Working Group. The protocol had been previously approved by Cabinet. I table it for the information of the House.
