



Speech by

# Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

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Hansard 27 August 1999

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Initiatives

**Hon. P. D. BEATTIE** (Brisbane Central— ALP) (Premier) (9.33 a.m.), by leave: Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are among the most disadvantaged in our society. Indigenous people make up 23% of the State's prison population but only 1.2% of those in higher education. Life expectancy is around 20 years lower for indigenous people than it is for others, and the indigenous community experiences high rates of unemployment and preventable disease.

The problems facing indigenous communities are not the making of my Government or even the one which preceded it. But Government does have an undeniable responsibility to work with indigenous people to address these problems. As Premier, I am committed to providing Queensland's indigenous communities with the services that they need and deserve.

The Budget next month will include a comprehensive package of initiatives that I believe will represent an important step along the path toward reconciliation and the improvement of conditions for indigenous Queenslanders. As part of a detailed package for indigenous Queenslanders, next month's State Budget will contain a number of initiatives which will significantly improve quality of life for our indigenous peoples.

The strengthening of Aboriginal families is to receive a boost with the development of two pilot Positive Parenting Programs targeted specifically to their needs. Whilst Positive Parenting Programs have proven successful in improving the parenting skills of many Queenslanders, this year's Budget provides \$140,000 to focus the program on indigenous families.

In Police, the Queensland Government will take new responsibility for the safety of Aboriginal communities, with \$1m for the trial of community police under Queensland Police Service control at Yarrabah, Woorabinda and Badu Island. Community policing is a major issue for Aboriginal communities where many people do not feel that they are properly protected by the local community police.

Indigenous communities will also receive greater access to the emergency services which most Queenslanders take for granted with two initiatives over the coming year. The Budget provides \$500,000 for the construction of a new ambulance station on Palm Island. This commitment follows Emergency Services Minister Merri Rose's recent announcement of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander coordination unit to improve emergency services in remote communities.

Education is the key to our children's futures, yet many indigenous children for whom English is a second language are disadvantaged from the start. This year's Budget will provide \$3.6m over three years for a special literacy and numeracy project. This project will provide an extra teacher in 20 schools across the State to work with children in schools where literacy is low. The program will provide hands-on assistance to indigenous children in schools including Doomadgee, Mornington Island, Bamaga and Thursday Island.

The key to growth and improved quality of life in indigenous communities is jobs, and it is appropriate that my Government should provide some of this employment. The Department of Emergency Services is leading the way, with 6.3% of personnel in north Queensland being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. This employment record will improve in future as a result of changes announced this week by Public Works Minister Robert Schwarten to improve local employment as part of State Purchasing Policy.

The development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is not just about providing services; it is also about ending welfare dependency by helping people to develop their own cultural identities, to build on their strengths and to make a contribution not only to their local communities but also to all of Queensland. This process will be a gradual one, but it is one that I am unequivocally committed to. I have met, as have my key Ministers, with indigenous leaders, including Noel Pearson, frequently over the last year and together we have discussed just how this should be done.

The Budget to be handed down on 14 September will provide a number of other significant developments in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy. Like the initiatives that I have just announced, it will be a sign of my Government's determination to work with indigenous communities to build a better future. This comes on top of the agreement—the protocol—that we have signed with QIWG in terms of negotiating a range of other issues. My Government is determined to work with indigenous communities to build a better future.

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