



Speech by

**Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE**

**MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE**

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Hansard 26 May 1999

### STOLEN GENERATION

**Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE** (Surfers Paradise—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (12.20 p.m.): The Opposition will be opposing the motion. At the outset, I just want to say that, whilst I respect the views of honourable members opposite, I ask them also to respect the views of honourable members on this side of the House. The other point that I wish to make is that I have been in this place for nearly 19 years. I would just make the observation that I cannot recall any debate in those 19 years where I have felt so intimidated in respect of expressing my point of view in this the Parliament of Queensland, which should honour and respect above all else freedom of speech. When we have Bringing Them Home put in front of us 10 minutes before the debate, when we have the debate quite rightly being opened to people in the gallery who have been affected but timed obviously to suit them, and when we have comments made by the Speaker that I believe could be interpreted as seeking to restrict debate in this place, I feel intimidated, and I think it betrays the basic principles of what Parliament is all about.

What we need to do is have a free and frank exchange. If we understand each other's point of view better, then we will have a better Australia. If that means that during the course of this debate to reach a greater understanding of each other's point of view some people might have to be offended, then so be it, because that is what the institution of Parliament is all about. If at the end of the day it helps the Premier understand my position or it helps me understand his position, so be it. But I find personally offensive and outrageous this ridiculous suggestion that somehow we are lesser human beings, that somehow we care less about Aboriginal Queenslanders and Aboriginal Australians because we do not go along with the motion proposed by the Premier.

The view of the coalition is that we believe that this matter was adequately dealt with in 1997, when this Parliament, under the previous coalition Government, expressed its sincere regret in respect of those children who had unjustifiably been removed from their parents. Together with the Prime Minister, I am of the view that there are legal implications in terms of a formal apology using the word "sorry". I know that the Premier says that he has legal advice to the contrary. We all know that, if we want two legal opinions, we see two lawyers.

What I think we are seeing here today is an action taken by the leader of the Queensland Government that befits the institution of political correctness. The reality is that, whether we like it or not, a sorry industry is being built in Australia and all around the world. This would not be the first Parliament. Look at what has happened in Canada, Europe and the Americas. I just make the observation that surely it is time to look to the future. Sure some dreadful things have happened in the history of Australia, the United States and Canada. However, the time has come to look forward to the future and to be thankful that we are Australian, not to be sorry that we are Australian. If in the process we can learn from history about how to do things better and not repeat the mistakes of the past, so be it.

The other point that I think has been overlooked by those who support this particular motion is that today's community standards are not those of our parents or grandparents. What is acceptable in contemporary 1999 Queensland is different from what was acceptable in 1970, 1960, 1950, 1920 or 1899. As community values change, if we are going to revisit history and keep applying our standards to what happened in the past, then I think we do ourselves a grave disservice.

The other point I would make is that Government members, the Premier and the Minister have asserted that this motion assists reconciliation. In my view, it works against reconciliation. It works

against understanding the problems of the past and what has to be done to fix them. Just as this motion today is dividing the Parliament, it has divided public opinion—it has divided the community. Every time we think we are making progress in dealing with the real and legitimate problems of Aboriginal Queenslanders in 1999, whether it be health, education, water or sewerage, we see this retreat into political correctness which generates all of the old bitterness and anxiety.

In my view, what we see in this motion is a motion that promotes division, not a motion that promotes reconciliation. That may not have been the intention, but that is the consequence. What is happening in this Parliament today in respect of this motion is typical of what is happening in the wider and broader community outside—the high court of popular opinion. I believe it would be far more appropriate on an occasion such as this to debate the good things that we can be doing and need to do to improve health, education, jobs, life expectancy, water, sewerage and housing for our indigenous people in this State, and to acknowledge that both sides of politics have not done it right in respect of those very core services that so many Queenslanders take for granted.

However, today, in recognition of this particular report, instead of discussing what we can be doing to make sure that Aboriginal communities have clean water, to make sure that kids get a decent education, to make sure that the hospitals are working, to make sure that the woeful standards of life expectancy and infant mortality are addressed—instead of having a sensible, rational debate on those issues—we see this retreat into political correctness, which at the end of the day will not create one job, will not improve health services, their standard of living or lifestyle but which, at the end of the day, will get a reaction from many people in mainstream Queensland and Australia.

The Premier may not like this, but I understand why the State Development and Public Works Organisation Amendment Bill has dropped down the Notice Paper. When that legislation was introduced into the Parliament, I raised concerns on behalf of the Opposition that, for the first time in the history of Queensland, it would give the Crown the power of acquisition over private property for other private developers, including native title. I had a large number of telephone calls. I had land councils contacting my office, saying, "What's this all about?" Is it not ironic that, as the Premier moves this sorry motion today, we have the State Development and Public Works Organisation Amendment Bill, the Deputy Premier's land grab, still on the Notice Paper but discreetly dropped down a few places so that it would not clash with this exercise of political correctness today?

I also know that the Indigenous Working Group was less than impressed. As a result of its representations, the Government is currently considering amendments to that particular legislation. So the Bill has been pulled, the Deputy Premier has been rolled, there are some amendments coming in to that particular legislation and, of course, today we have this motion from the Premier on Sorry Day, I am told, to square off. There was a bit of a deal offered and maybe the Parliament of Queensland might agree, as a result of certain amendments to that piece of legislation, to also formally apologise to many of those people who were so upset about that particular legislation.

Who is next? I acknowledge the injustices that we are discussing today, but it is one of a long series of injustices in building our nation, which today is one of the great egalitarian nations on earth and where people are treated equally or, in some cases, more than equally. Public confidence is lost when Government agendas are determined by the politically correct. I say to the Premier that, if he wants to do something corrective, let us work together on the real issues of health, housing, education, infrastructure, infant mortality, life expectancies, a decent water supply, sewerage systems that work, community facilities and jobs.

I also make this point: if we want to do something to help many of our fellow Queenslanders who are indigenous in this State, Governments and the indigenous community together have to stand up against the likes of Murrandoo Yanner, who still today is out there subverting major development projects, such as Century Zinc—projects that can be a social and economic lifeline for so many indigenous Queenslanders in remote parts of our State. That is what we should be doing. We should be moving together collectively as a nation.

I just make this observation in closing: Australians are proud of our egalitarian society. We are proud of what we have today. We have one of the most robust democracies in the world. But if we start legislating so that certain groups within a community have more privileges and more rights than other members in the community, we create division and we create a backlash and at the end of the day that helps absolutely no-one. For those reasons, the Opposition will be opposing the motion.

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