



Speech by

SHAUN NELSON

MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

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COMMUNITY SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr NELSON (Tablelands—IND) (2.39 p.m.): It is pleasing to see that this Government is taking what I consider to be a very small step in the right direction. Accountability in the communities that we speak of is probably one of the biggest problems that is standing between what some people call reconciliation and what other people see as the agenda against reconciliation.

The other day the front page of the Australian contained a report stating that \$50m in royalties has gone unaccounted for. I can cite many issues on the tablelands. For example, I was invited by the local Aboriginal community to sort out an issue that it had with ATSIC. In excess of \$250,000 in public grants had gone missing under the previous administration.

Importantly, we should be addressing the sorts of people who get involved with these councils and communities. Some of these people are running their own agenda and are using public money for their own personal good. I am speaking about people such as Jason Yanner and Noel Pearson, who are two extreme examples of people who are not representing their people or community but their own agenda—and they are doing a frightful job of it. I wish I had a dollar for every Aboriginal who has come to my electorate office in Mareeba and told me that they do not agree with the things that Jason Yanner and Noel Pearson do and that they would like to be rid of those people. Some Aboriginals have told me that they would prefer the Government to step in and ensure that the funds are used in a responsible manner. They want to be treated just like every other Australian and have delivered to them by a responsible council elected by them the sorts of things that most people in the council areas around Brisbane take for granted. They feel that would be much better than having people such as Noel Pearson and Jason Yanner speaking for them. Recently, in a criminal act, Mr Pearson assaulted a woman on radio. I or any other honourable member would have been charged for doing that, yet he used his position to squirm out of it. He got away with it basically scot-free. I believe this Bill addresses these sorts of people. The Bill shows these people that the Queensland Government and the Federal Government will take action against rogue elements in the Aboriginal industry who run the agenda for their own purposes and do not intend to do any good for their people.

I applaud the Government for taking this stance to try to get some more accountability in this area. When it comes down to it, we are talking about public moneys. I and many other members have said all along that these public moneys are not getting to the people who need them the most. That point is best illustrated by the situation in Kakadu, which has been going on for many years.

During the Sorry Day debate I said that people are not looking for us to say sorry; they are looking for an improvement in living standards and a betterment of their way of life. Ultimately, they are not getting that, because the money does not go to the people who genuinely need it. Generally, when that money does get there it has been so watered down or soaked up through this person or that person taking out fees it ultimately never addresses the problem that it was meant to address in the first place. No Australian in my electorate would have a problem with money being made available for places such as Old Mapoon or Injinoo if it was going to permit the people who live in those areas to access the same sorts of facilities available in Mareeba, Atherton or even Brisbane. Nobody would disagree with that. I welcome this Bill, because it is a positive step in the right direction. However, we need to take many more steps in this direction before we are all once again Australians who have access to the same benefits, rights and equity. That should be the ultimate goal of this Bill.