



Speech by

SHAUN NELSON

MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

Hansard 23 August 2000

MINERAL RESOURCES AMENDMENT BILL

Mr NELSON (Tablelands—IND) (9.49 p.m.): There is nothing more illuminating for somebody who grew up in outback Queensland than to listen to somebody who grew up in the city and who lives on a half acre block in Kurwongbah speaking about attachment to the land. This Bill is one of the most sensible Bills ever brought before this House. It has been brought before this House by one of its most sensible members. It does not take away anyone's rights. It simply injects equality into the whole debate, something that I thought that the Australian Labor Party fought long and hard for in standing up for equal rights and equal access. I heard the member for Kurwongbah's speech. It was a highly illuminating script ripped straight out of the annals of the High Court's decision.

Mrs Lavarch: I wrote it myself.

Mr NELSON: The member wrote it herself. Yeah, right!

Mrs Lavarch: I did—from my own research and my own beliefs.

Mr NELSON: The saddest thing about this whole debate is the people we are actually talking about. When one looks at the demographics of my electorate, apparently 28% of it is made up of indigenous people, making it an area with one of the highest indigenous populations in the State. Most Aboriginal people I talk to in my electorate want one simple thing, and that is to be treated like everyone else. That is what the member for Kurwongbah said: they want to be treated equally.

It amuses me when I hear statements made in a vain attempt at reconciliation when people say that we need to take this poor and underprivileged huddled mass and do all of these amazing things to ensure that they are on an equal footing. No-one can argue the fact that there is a definite need for some intervention by the Government in Aboriginal missions or depressed areas throughout the State so that those people can achieve the same goals as people in the cities do. However, it is not simply because of race. I can assure the House that there are white children in Ravenshoe who have just as many problems getting access to services as Aboriginals. This is why this debate no longer angers me. This is why that foolish and ridiculous attempt to storm the Sydney Harbour Bridge no longer angers me. Do members know why? I will tell them why.

Recently, a young Austrian student told me something very interesting. She was talking about what is being done in Austria to make this generation sorry for the Holocaust. They are taking it into the schools. They are trying to engender guilt into the younger generations. When one tries to make people say sorry for something they did not do, all one is doing is engendering guilt. It is an attempt to breed guilt into society. It is like saying, "Your culture is wrong and what happened in your past is wrong and you need to say sorry for that." Engendering guilt in people gets them riled. Most of the 17 year olds I talk to see one thing and one thing only: they see that other children in their classes have access to things to which they do not have access. Those children are in the same class. They sit side by side. They have exactly the same level of achievement in most things. However, they see that one group gets one thing and the other group another.

The Bill I introduced which was thrown out in a quite dastardly fashion while I was not here went to the heart of this matter. When we separate people in society but try to keep them equal, the Dutch have a word for that—apartheid. Doing that creates two separate nations in one country. All it does is

separate people and makes them angry and leads to their fighting each other. That is not making things better.

A lot of members come from country areas. When one talks about reconciliation, many people in towns such as Ravenshoe get a dazed look on their face and say, "What the hell are you talking about?" I would treat the Aboriginal people I know living in Malanda just like I would treat anyone else, and so would everyone else in the town. There is very little racism in country towns. Do members know where the majority of racism lies? It lies in the big cities. Ever since I have been coming to Brisbane as a member of Parliament I walk from one end of George Street to the other. I do not think I have ever seen an Aboriginal person in George Street, and that is the God honest truth. However, if one walks up and down the main street of Mareeba, there are plenty of Aboriginal people, but one does not see people treating them differently because of that. They are people just like everyone else. When we start trying to highlight the colour of someone's skin and create separate rights because of that, there will be a backlash from the community. That backlash was visible in the formation of One Nation. It is still visible in the community.

It was thought that there would be 300 people storming the Sydney Harbour Bridge. My little brother went to it, and I guarantee the House that he does not believe in reconciliation. He went because he got a free bus ride to Sydney and he got to walk on the Sydney Harbour Bridge, two things he has always wanted he do. He did not carry a banner, but he wanted to do it, as did the 30 or 40 who went on the bus with him. I am sorry to burst the bubble, but that is the way it is. The simple fact is that that whole policy is the most racist thing I have ever seen. It is exactly the same thing the South Africans did for years in trying to separate people according to the colour of their skin.

However, there is a funny side to this. This Minister knows how much contact I have with indigenous people in my community. Does the Minister remember a town by the name of Laura? I talked to a group of Aborigines from Laura and they told me about one of the Minister's wonderful journeys there. The simple fact is that the Minister has very little real knowledge of what those people and their lifestyle are like.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Reeves): Order! I have been quite liberal in the member's six minutes so far. I remind the member that we are talking about the member for Gladstone's Bill. I ask the member to start referring to it.

Mr NELSON: In her second-reading speech, if the Deputy Speaker wants me to refer to that, the member for Gladstone said—

"At the time, I expressed concern that we were talking about an inequitable endowment of power to a specific group of people (Aboriginal Queenslanders) while excluding a complementary group of people (other Queensland leaseholders)."

This is exactly what I am talking about. Let us face it: what we are saying to Queensland leaseholders is that if they were an Aboriginal leaseholder and they had native title over the property, they would have different sets of rights. It has nothing to do with whether they have fair and equal access to schools, etc. It has to do with simply giving people the rights that everyone else has in negotiating with mining companies. The Premier and the Government are very big on bashing oil companies, mining companies, multinationals and anyone else who wants to come along at the moment.

Mr Hayward: You're bashing the miners tonight. It's unbelievable.

Mr NELSON: I am not bashing the miners.

Mr Hayward: Of course you're bashing the miners.

Mr NELSON: If it was up to me, there would be no such thing as native title, my friend. If it was up to me, that would be the last thing—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I remind the member to speak through the chair. It would also assist the debate if members let the member finish his speech.

Mr NELSON: It certainly would. As I said, if it was up to me, we would not be separating people. We would not be giving them extra rights in the first place and therefore there would be no need to bring in this Bill. What we are breeding in society is justifiable anger because of the separation of the races. The fact that the Minister disagrees with me means that I am right.

This Bill goes some way to try to bring the balance back so that we do not have a system of apartheid in this nation, so that we can stop the inherent racism in this irrational debate over reconciliation and saying sorry, so that we can bring the country back together and so that we can move forward as Australians. The simple fact is that we are all Australians. I cannot go to Ireland or England and claim native title. We are all stuck on this island together. In 100 years' time, this argument will still be floating around unless something is done about it now to try to rein in the rampant, insane agenda that is the whole apartheid system. This Bill goes some way to changing that. It goes some way to giving leaseholders exactly the same rights as a native title owner with exactly the same entitlement to the land.

We talk about Aboriginal cultures having close ties to the land after 40,000 years, and my personal belief is that Aboriginal people have been here a lot longer than 40,000 years. This can be related to my attachment to the land. I was born in 1973. I have been on the planet for 27 years. I have 27 years' attachment to the land. The simple fact is that I am as Australian as another 27 year old who was born here. It does not matter how long my ancestors have been here. Attachment to the land is to the land that one lives on and the land that one loves.

What is this an argument about? Is it an argument about who loves the land more and who likes the land more? I can assure honourable members that I have a deep and abiding love of my land. I would fight tooth and nail to defend it and I would fight tooth and nail to stay on it. I would not want a mining company coming on to my leasehold land which had been in the family for years and which I had lived on for 27 years. The last thing I would want is a mining company coming on there and doing as it pleased. As the member for Barambah quite rightly said, I would like the right to negotiate just like everyone else.

This boils down to the simple question about who loves the land more, and that cannot be defined. We cannot say, "This person loves the land more because their ancestors were here 40,000 years before ours." Can members imagine the insanity of a land rights debate in Europe? If that sort of debate was brought on, those in the European Union would spend the rest of their lives arguing things such as whether the Jutes were somewhere in 1036 or what form of Russian army came up into another area in 1920. We live in a country that has not had to go through that sort of rubbish, yet now we are importing a system by which we will have to define land ownership by how long we have been on a certain piece of land. It is absolute insanity.

As I said, this Bill goes a little way to changing this absolute insanity. It has nothing to do with race. It may shock some members of the House to know that my grandmother is Tongan. She is as black as the ace of spades. I am not racist. I have no racist agenda whatsoever. I believe firmly and utterly in equality—that every man is created equal and should be judged by the content of their character and not by the colour of their skin. When we say to a whole group of people that they are all deserving of certain rights because of the colour of their skin, regardless of the situation they are in, we are being racist. As far as I know there is no means testing for Abstudy. I would like to stand corrected on that, but I cannot be because there is no means testing.

Saying to a whole group of people, "Here are rights for you because you must be underprivileged because of the colour of your skin", is the most racist thing I have ever heard in my life. That is the height of racism. That is the definition of racism—when one looks at a group of people and says, "You must deserve these rights because of the colour of your skin." I do not do that because I am not a member of the ALP. I take each man as he comes. The simple fact is that if a lot more people did that we would not be having these sorts of debates in this Parliament.

Mr Dalgleish: They single them out.

Mr NELSON: Yes, they single them out. In every piece of legislation that goes through this House, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are singled out for special treatment. The simple fact is: the sooner we start treating all Queenslanders the same under law—that is where this law comes in, because it is trying to stem this insane tide of racism that the socialists have brought into this country—the quicker these sorts of problems will go away and we can get back to being Queenslanders.

As I said, what 95% to 100% of the Aboriginal people in my electorate want more than anything else is just to be Queenslanders like everyone else. They just want to get on with their lives and not have to deal with this stupid stuff championed by absolute scum of the earth such as Noel Pearson, whom the Beattie Government panders to day and night and who is trying to set himself up as the king of the cape. People such as him and Jason Yanner are feeding off this and using it as a weapon. They are getting away with murder because they hide behind this wall that has been built for them.

As I said, this Bill goes some way to addressing that problem. The more we push this, the more the younger people will move away. The greatest thing of all is that young people are starting to look at the inequalities of the system. We cannot lie to young people. They sit back and say, "We have listened to all this wonderful Government propaganda, but we have got this issue and this issue." The Government can lie to some of the people some of the time, but it cannot lie to all of the people all of the time. Hopefully when the younger generations come through they will throw out this insane agenda. I am backing the member's Bill, and every member of this Parliament who believes in equality should do the same.
