



Speech by

Hon. R. WELFORD

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

Hansard 30 May 2001

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

National Reconciliation Week

Hon. R. J. WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice) (10.05 a.m.), by leave: Last Wednesday the Federal Court gave its consent to a native title agreement returning seven islands in the Torres Strait to the Kaurareg people. It was an historic day for the Kaurareg, closing the chapter of more than 120 years of dislocation and separation from their land. It was also another demonstration of our government's policy success on native title—our focus on negotiation rather than expensive and protracted litigation. What better proof than the fact that, of the 18 native title consent determinations Australiawide, 15 have now been negotiated right here in Queensland?

Our attitude is one of compromise, of genuine negotiation. Our government is demonstrating that an approach based on goodwill can achieve real results, transforming the principle of coexistence into a practical and substantial reality, not just for indigenous Queenslanders but for all Queenslanders.

This is National Reconciliation Week, and it is a reminder that in looking to the future we learn the lessons of the past. Our government is genuinely committed to the reconciliation process. We have apologised to indigenous Australians for the atrocities of the past and have taken a partnership approach in the development of policies. This is in stark contrast to the Howard government. It is still burning bridges and building roadblocks. The Prime Minister will not say sorry and even denies the fact of the stolen generations.

We have moved on from that mean-spirited, intractable attitude. We are getting on with the job. We introduced a successful native title regime in Queensland, investing hundreds of hours into negotiating a fair and balanced outcome that recognises the needs of the mining sector and economic development, creates jobs and allows indigenous people to benefit. We have signed the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice Agreement. We are in the process of compensating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were underpaid by previous National Party governments between 1975 and 1986. We have legislated to enable elders to give advice to the courts on cultural considerations relating to sentencing. We are training indigenous JPs to enable them to get more involved in the justice process. And we have taken a leadership role on Cape York partnerships.

The Queensland of today is remarkably different from the Queensland of 20 years ago, of 10 years ago and even five years ago. Our government governs for all Queenslanders. Our proud record on native title and other actions I have outlined today demonstrate that fact. Unfortunately, the Howard government and some of his supporters in the opposition want to hold our nation in the past. The Prime Minister refuses to move on. For him, the 21st century has yet to arrive.

In this special week, National Reconciliation Week, I call on the Prime Minister to reflect our nation's maturity: apologise to indigenous Australians and put in place policies and actions that recognise that living standards of many indigenous Australians require urgent attention.
