



Speech by

Hon. JUDY SPENCE

MEMBER FOR MOUNT GRAVATT

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
Governance White Paper

Hon. J. C. SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Families and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Disability Services and Minister for Seniors) (10.03 a.m.): Last Thursday, at the Aboriginal Coordinating Council meeting in Cairns, I announced the government's proposals for new laws for Aboriginal community governance. The proposals are set out in a white paper which I am tabling in the House today. In this document, we have stated our commitment and detailed our plans to fundamentally reform the current system of Aboriginal councils in this state. It is not an attack on the Aboriginal identity but a move towards equality.

In March this year, we released a green paper setting out a range of options for new laws for community governance. We distributed almost 2,000 copies of the green paper. We held meetings in all of the 15 deed of grant in trust communities, as well as in Aurukun and Mornington Island. About 250 residents participated, including 86 councillors and council staff. We received 71 written submissions from a wide range of stakeholders. Today, I am also tabling a summary of the feedback to the green paper.

It is clear from our consultations and our research that the Community Services Act is outdated, flawed and must be repealed. The fundamental principle underpinning the white paper is that legislation will no longer set Aboriginal communities apart from other Queensland communities. Residents of Aboriginal communities expect the same standards of governance as in other parts of Queensland. Aboriginal councils will make the transition to the status of shire councils under the Local Government Act. The Local Government Act will provide a strong and accountable framework for governance in these communities. Councils in Aboriginal communities will be required to meet the best practice benchmarks that ensure equitable, transparent and effective local government, such as:

- developing corporate and operational plans;
- preparing annual reports to inform residents about council activities;
- greater transparency about pecuniary interests and the remuneration of councillors; and
- a better separation between elected councillors and council staff.

The new laws will also make allowance for the fact that Aboriginal councils are still building their capacity and face many difficulties. The laws will allow for a transitional period of four years for councils to meet the new standards.

The government recognises that it will take more than changes to the law to improve community governance. We are also committing to boosting the support for councils to build their governance capacity. The changes to the law will make no difference unless we can address critical needs such as training for councils, recruiting and retaining better staff and more efficient use of funding. We will be there to support councils as they make the transition. The white paper does mark the end of paternalism and provides a way forward for indigenous communities through good corporate governance with open, transparent and accountable decision making.