



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR ALGESTER

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ABORIGINAL CULTURAL HERITAGE BILL; TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CULTURAL HERITAGE BILL

Ms STRUTHERS (Algester—ALP) (10.03 p.m.): One of the most powerful messages that I have heard continuously from people in my local area, particularly around Acacia Ridge, and from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people statewide is that we are not simply a minority group; we are the original inhabitants of this country. I commend the efforts of the minister, his departmental staff, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and many others who have had a key stake in the development of these bills for the important step that they are taking towards recognition of the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the original inhabitants of our great nation.

I also commend the cooperative spirit shown amongst all parties in developing these reforms. It is very encouraging to see that 'the times, they are a changing' in a very positive way. The Queensland Mining Council, Agforce, the Queensland Farmers Federation and other key bodies are on side and have contributed positively and constructively to this legislation. It is a shame to see conservative politicians like the member for Tablelands and many of our conservative federal colleagues create hysteria and hype up fear around native title and cultural heritage claims. Many non-indigenous Australians, because of this hyped-up hysteria, have become fearful and resentful of the so-called Aboriginal takeover of land, including, as the member for Tablelands would have us believe here tonight, our own suburban backyards which are supposedly at risk.

This sort of hysteria is not helpful, it is not constructive, it is short sighted, it is not evidence based; it is purely irresponsible fearmongering. Thankfully, good sense is prevailing. These bills provide effective protection of Aboriginal heritage. They create processes for addressing land use impact with certainty. They create processes to deal with these matters in a timely, cost-efficient and sensible way. At the core of these bills is the value that we all bear responsibility and custodianship for the heritage values of this great ancient land that we all share.

I would like to place on record my commendation and my support for the proud and very strong way in which the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school community in my local area promote indigenous culture and independence. It is concerning that so many people are feeling frustrated and very angered by the way in which our Prime Minister, John Howard, has failed to give due respect and recognition to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as original inhabitants of this great nation. People like the Murri school community in my area feel like they are taking a step forward and then 10 steps backward in this current climate. Prime Minister John Howard has divided our nation and fuelled fear and envy among non-indigenous Australians. He has certainly created a lot of division rather than helping to unify our nation.

The vast majority of Australians and Queenslanders want to see a unified nation, and many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and many non-indigenous people are working hard to achieve reconciliation and greater equality for indigenous people. I am encouraged by our state government efforts to recognise the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I am encouraged by our state government efforts to work hard at reconciliation, economic and social equality and to promote the truth about our indigenous history. These bills provide a further demonstration of our determination to promote a unified state and nation.