



Speech by

Hon. Liddy Clark

MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

Hansard Wednesday, 1 September 2004

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, Community and Personal Histories Branch

Hon. E.A. CLARK (Clayfield—ALP) (Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy) (10.19 a.m.): We have all heard stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders not growing up within their own families, being denied the right to be held and to be comforted by their mother, or their father, or carer. They could not see their family's smiles or hear their voices. I have heard many of these stories whilst meeting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities around the state. They are stories of separation and of sorrow. They are stories of family contacts lost and connections to country and past generations broken.

Not all of these stories have unhappy endings. The Queensland government's Community and Personal Histories Branch within the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy is supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in their search to discover personal and family histories. For 14 years, this branch has helped Queenslanders reconnect with their past and, in some cases, contact their families of origin. The Community and Personal Histories Branch has responded to more than 8,000 requests for information. The staff, including Queensland's first indigenous archivist, Loris Williams, do this through helping people access historical records about them, their families and their communities.

The branch has completed a number of large indexing projects, including the indexing of the correspondence created by the Home Secretary's Office between 1896 and 1930. This includes references to thousands of indigenous people and will provide many families with more information about their history. More than 9,000 personal files have now also been digitally scanned to ensure the preservation of the original records and allow instant access to these records. The branch receives about 800 requests for information a year, many of them from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders requiring information to complete reports for native title purposes.

I am proud of the people who work towards this worthy end and proud that the Beattie government is able to provide this service. By improving access to records, we are improving the chances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to reclaim their families and their homelands. This is an important part of the reconciliation process.