



Speech by

**Jason O'Brien**

**MEMBER FOR COOK**

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## **POLICING IN REMOTE COMMUNITIES**

**Mr O'BRIEN** (Cook—ALP) (12.15 pm): I, too, would like to discuss policing in Queensland and, in particular, policing in remote communities. Any professional officer—whether they be a nurse, teacher, police officer or administrator—who goes into a remote Indigenous community faces many challenges. They face a different culture, a different language and a different way of doing business. They face problems with isolation. They do not get the services that people take for granted in the capital cities and the provincial towns across the eastern seaboard.

As the Premier alluded to earlier this morning, it is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit people to work in DOGIT communities. There are a range of reasons for this. There is the issue of standard of accommodation and the pay, but, more generally, lifestyle issues are more of a factor. The reality is that there is plenty of work in the cities for these people so it is difficult to convince them to leave their cosy lifestyle and face the challenges of Indigenous community life.

For police I think the challenge of fitting into communities is far harder than for other professionals. It is easier for a nurse or a teacher to form relationships than for a police officer simply because of the different roles they undertake in the community. There are plenty of things individual officers can do to help them fit into the local community. They can coach the football team, organise youth discos or simply wander around the community talking to people. Most officers do that. Most officers try to engage with their communities outside of their professional life. I think it is important that they do. It sometimes goes unrecognised.

I welcome the tabling today of the partnerships Queensland report into the state of Indigenous affairs in Queensland. While I have yet to have a chance to read the report in its entirety I know the condition of DOGIT communities in my electorate well enough to anticipate much of what it will say. Notwithstanding the report, it has to be said that it is not all doom and gloom in Indigenous communities. There are positive things happening. New leadership is emerging that is far more capable of dealing with other levels of government than before and people are increasingly determined to make a go of their lives.

There are many things that prevent Aboriginal people living in DOGIT communities from getting ahead. I can advise the House that none of these have anything to do with policing or government commitment. It comes down to land tenure. While no government has recognised more native title over land than the Beattie Labor government it does not and will not provide a panacea to the problems facing Aboriginal communities. Recognition of traditional rights provides some comfort to traditional inhabitants but does not provide a basis for economic development.

In fact, besides re-establishing the rights the ancestors of today's traditional owners enjoyed 200 years ago, the only power native title bestows is the ability to inhibit economic development. Absolutely nothing is going to change in Indigenous communities until the nexus surrounding land—its ownership, its use and its development—is resolved. Nothing will engage the Aboriginal community more than a discussion about enhancing Indigenous land rights. It will not matter how many police officers we send to communities or what programs we run; we must find a way to give Indigenous people a greater say over the land that is theirs so that they can truly engage in the real economy.