



Speech by

Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard Wednesday, 13 February 2008

MOTION: DEERAL, MR E AND BONNER, MR N

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (6.13 pm): This should be a celebration. This motion acknowledges two great men who really bridged the gap between two very different worlds. These two great Indigenous Queenslanders were the first in their fields. Eric Deeral was the first Indigenous member of this Queensland parliament and Neville Bonner was the first Indigenous member of the federal parliament.

I am disappointed by the previous speaker. The current member for Cook has tried to undermine the significance of Eric Deeral's contribution to this place and, in fact, his election in the first place by insinuating that there was something inappropriate in having two National Party candidates in the field. In fact, that was quite a common practice. For the information of the member for Cook, it was also quite a common practice with white preselected candidates. In fact, when in another state my own grandfather ran as a preselected candidate for the then Country Party, he ran against another preselected Country Party member. He did not get elected, but I doubt that he blamed prejudice for that.

Mr Horan: Lockyer.

Miss SIMPSON: I understand that the same applied in more recent times with candidates for the seat of Lockyer. Therefore, let us put paid to the poisonous contribution of the member for Cook, which did not recognise the very significant election of this great man to the Queensland parliament as a representative of the National Party.

Eric Deeral really is a man of great dignity, and those who have had the privilege to meet him will acknowledge that. He came from an era when there was a lot less access to education, and he will acknowledge that himself. There was less access to opportunity. Today in this place we have acknowledged that there is much to be done to assist the Indigenous people of this state to overcome the injustices and the disadvantages of the past. There are still many issues that we are concerned about, particularly with regard to extremely high levels of infant mortality. However, let us concentrate on Eric Deeral's contribution to Queensland. I found a *Stateline* interview with Eric Deeral very informative. Interviewer Kim Landers asked him what it was that made him decide to run for parliament in 1974. Eric said—

To be truthful, I did not decide to run for Parliament. It was decided by my Elders, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders at a meeting at Palm Island in '64.

Kim Landers asked, 'So why did they choose you?'. Eric replied—

They saw a special something in me probably that I was capable of being a Member for Cook. I just obeyed my Elders and I said well if the Elders want me to stand, I will stand and with that I then accepted when the National Party or the Coalition Party decided that I should run as a candidate for the electorate of Cook in 1974.

That is a very interesting interview.

As the member for Algeester mentioned, a number of issues relating to the lack of Indigenous representation since 1974 were addressed in the report of the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee, *Hands on Parliament*. I was the deputy chair of that committee and we presented a

very important report to the parliament. I acknowledge that the current Speaker has sought to endorse some of those recommendations, including the appointment of an Indigenous liaison officer to the parliament. I think that is a positive step. However, I believe that we need to see more Indigenous representatives elected at all levels of government in Australia—local, state and federal. The local government level should never be looked down on as being somehow unimportant, because those representatives are at the coalface when it comes to representing people.

Mr Horan: Now they have to resign their position if they want to stand for office.

Miss SIMPSON: Yes. Unfortunately they now have to resign their position if they want to stand for state parliament. I believe that is a barrier to future Indigenous representatives coming into this state parliament. I notice laughter from Labor members opposite, and that is disappointing. We need to look at ways in which we can actually assist people who work at the grassroots in the vast areas of Queensland. I particularly acknowledge that there are groups that are under-represented in this parliament, and certainly that barrier at the local government level will make it harder for them in the future.

To Eric Deeral and the late Neville Bonner we owe a great debt. I do hope that many more such leaders will follow them into this place and that the barriers that have been put in the way of future candidates will be removed.