



Speech by

Ms Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard Tuesday, 13 May 2008

**ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER LAND AMENDMENT
BILL; ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMUNITIES
(JUSTICE, LAND AND OTHER MATTERS) AND OTHER ACTS
AMENDMENT BILL**

Ms GRACE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (4.03 pm): I rise to congratulate the Bligh government on its commitment to assisting the Indigenous communities in their fight to overcome the dysfunction that alcohol is contributing to the 19 discrete Indigenous communities with the main aim being to improve the health and wellbeing of the residents. The government recognised that there was a need to finetune the existing legislation through introducing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities (Justice, Land and Other Matters) and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2008. This bill builds on the current legislation that enables alcohol restrictions to be implemented and enforced.

Some have argued that the restrictions are discriminatory. It is true that they are focused on those living in the discrete Aboriginal and mainland Torres Strait Islander communities. However, the point of the restrictions is to improve the life experience of individuals and families in the communities and, indeed, the communities as a whole. It is a difficult and bold step but a step in the right direction if we are to be serious about improving the lives of those affected by this bill.

It is clear in my mind that the right to drink is not a fundamental freedom or human right intended to be protected under the anti-discrimination legislation. However, a child does have a right to a safe living environment and to be educated, and it is this right that is recognised in international and domestic laws. It would be seriously remiss of the government to tolerate the significant harms and impacts which are being suffered by women and children in these communities by not tackling the issue of alcohol use and abuse. The government has an obligation to address family violence and child abuse and neglect. Often the roots of such violence and neglect lie squarely with binge drinking and frequent alcohol abuse.

Since the introduction of the alcohol management plans, the communities have seen some improvements in their livelihoods. In some communities there are fewer large gatherings happening where alcohol and binge drinking once predominated, the streets are cleaner and there are more kids attending school. While the initial improvements have not been sustained through the health and crime statistics, there is a general agreement that things are better since alcohol management has been in place, and that has to be a step in the right direction. However, there still is a lot more needed to close the gap for these communities and for their members to have similar life experiences as other Queenslanders. This bill is about closing the gap for a better quality of life.

I am pleased to see, however, that the emphasis is not on legislation alone. The recently announced \$100 million package of health and social services to be introduced in the communities will support this new legislation and will support communities to stop the damage that alcohol is causing and to start building a healthy community. Clearly, this is the aim and objective of the combined package approach. It is also good to note that the Commonwealth government has acknowledged its role in providing around a third of the funding and that state and Commonwealth agencies are working together to ensure that

services are coordinated and complementary. It is essential that such services are delivered quickly, are well targeted and are well coordinated as this will work to enable the best outcome in supporting Indigenous communities practically to achieve better living standards. That is what this bill is all about and really aiming to achieve.

I support the government on taking the step to make this policy more effective on a practical level. In closing, I state that when it comes to delivering real benefits for Indigenous peoples in the state, I will put this Labor government's record up against that of those on the other side of the House any time. I commend the bill to the members of this place.