



Speech by
Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard Tuesday, 23 February 2010

CONSTITUTION (PREAMBLE) AMENDMENT BILL

Ms GRACE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (3.43 pm): At this special moment I, too, want to acknowledge the traditional owners and pay my respects to their elders, both past and present. I rise to support the Constitution (Preamble) Amendment Bill 2009. I am pleased to be in a position to vote in favour of this bill. I welcome the key object of the bill, which is to acknowledge the peoples of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent as the first Australians and, indeed, the first Queenslanders. Unlike those opposite, I have no problem and no difficulty acknowledging what is reality and fact. I believe that it is just to recognise our past, look to our future and reflect on our history as part of a modern Queensland Constitution.

An enduring statement on behalf of all Queenslanders that acknowledges a Queensland society based on democracy, freedom and peace and that reflects its citizens' aspirations, values and hopes can do much to unite us in the future. Recognition and respect are important values. I commend the Law, Justice and Safety Committee's report, which recommended that we recognise this great country's and Queensland's first inhabitants, and respect and honour their unique values and cultures which have, indeed, deepened and enriched the lives of our community and me. Throughout our history, Indigenous people have had it tough. They have been victims of questionable past government policies and they have been discriminated against in many ways. In the spirit of reconciliation, it is more than important—it is crucial—that, in modernising Queensland's Constitution, we honour the true first Australians and pay tribute to their ancestors.

Equally, I also welcome the acknowledgement of the achievements of our forebears who, coming from many different and diverse backgrounds, created this great state. Their foresight, hard work and struggles are well documented. They were hardworking, fearless and loyal citizens who toiled to make a better home and were not afraid to lead the way. Last year, celebrating the state's 150th anniversary year, many celebrations were held throughout the state, many of which recognised the many cultures and events that made Queensland what it is today. It was an honour to attend many of those celebrations, and I can only state how proud I was to be a Queenslanders at this time and to have had the opportunity to participate in the many different ways the community celebrated and acknowledged the past and looked to the future. Where would we be without their courage, fortitude and leadership?

If our forebears had paid heed to the opposition's reasoning in not supporting the bill—that is, insisting on a costly and legally unnecessary referendum, fear of its use and just denying history—they would never have passed Queensland's Constitution as we know it today. Like the government, this state's forebears had the leadership and wisdom for responsible and representative government. I believe that they, in the spirit of the ongoing reconciliation process, would have been proud to take the important step to ensure Queensland's Constitution recognises the ancient cultures of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This is leadership. Unfortunately, it is leadership the opposition is bereft of. Those opposite wander around in fear, denial and scaremongering.

I congratulate the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council, which submitted a statement of recognition. It was pleasing to learn that that statement was included in the bill, in full and unamended. This is an historic moment. I am particularly proud that the process of drafting the preamble

ensured that the council was part of the preamble's formation and enactment. This land's traditional owners and the many and diverse cultures that have made this state great deserve to be recognised. I believe it serves as a platform for a vibrant multicultural community. I am a proud member of this community, a proud Queenslander and proud to be part of a government that takes leadership seriously, taking the opportunity to honour and build upon the foundations of our democracy.

The world is not perfect and this state is not perfect. If we waited to do anything to our Constitution until all was perfect then I am afraid nothing would ever be done. Not even our current Constitution would have been made. This preamble is long overdue and will be the rock upon which our democratic institutions will rest and endure. It is just, it is right and it is far-sighted. I commend the bill to the House.