



Speech by


Hon. Glen Elmes

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

Hansard Tuesday, 29 May 2012

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

National Sorry Day

 **Hon. GW ELMES** (Noosa—LNP) (Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs and Minister Assisting the Premier) (9.53 am): At this time of the year there are three significant events for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians alike: National Sorry Day, which was held last Saturday; Reconciliation Week, which runs until 3 June; and Mabo Day, which is also celebrated on 3 June. National Sorry Day on 26 May was a time when all Australians and Queenslanders were able to take time out and reflect on the hurt and suffering endured by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who formed the stolen generations and their descendants. It is important for all of us to acknowledge the wrongs of the past and to commemorate those who endured suffering and hurt as a result of those wrongs.

Since I have taken on my new portfolio responsibilities I have become increasingly aware of significant issues affecting Indigenous people and have come to recognise that National Sorry Day is a significant day for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians alike. For Australians and Queenslanders it is important to acknowledge the wrongs of the past and to commemorate those who have endured suffering and hurt as a result of those wrongs. As painful as past events have been, as we reflect on that past we should also reflect on our responsibilities for the future and how, through positive actions, we can ensure such wrongs never happen again. My commitment is to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to secure their futures. That includes providing for homeownership, improving health outcomes and increasing successful participation in schooling.

In Queensland, National Sorry Day was marked by events across the state, including concerts and barbecues, flag raising events, morning teas and lunches. In Brisbane, for example, remembrance ceremonies were held at The Gap, Sherwood and West End for the Stolen Generation Alliance and other groups. As happens each year, Sorry Day traditionally is held in the lead up to Reconciliation Week which, of course, is on now and concludes on 3 June. Reconciliation Week is an opportunity for Queenslanders to be actively involved in the reconciliation process by considering what they could do to improve the employment, health and education opportunities for the state's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Indigenous peoples. We are making real progress with reconciliation, but the focus must remain on practical measures to improve the lives of Indigenous Queenslanders.

While recognising the achievements and successes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, it does not change the fact that many of them remain economically and socially disadvantaged. We all need to contribute in practical ways, working together to enable changes in people's lives for the better. The Newman government is certainly committed to ensuring that Indigenous Queenslanders have access to the same opportunities and choices available to non-Indigenous Queenslanders. It requires everyone to play a part in opening up these opportunities for jobs, access to adequate health services, schools and housing.

Reconciliation Week is being marked by a variety of events across Queensland. At Townsville a reconciliation festival will be held this weekend at the Strand Water Park; in Gladstone children from the Clinton State School will tackle a drawing and writing competition based on what reconciliation means to them; and, of course, amongst the many Brisbane events, a concert for young people was held at the State Library at South Bank last Sunday. I encourage individuals, businesses, organisations and schools to think about what reconciliation means and how they can be involved in an active and united effort to bring it into reality.

It is particularly significant this year that the last day of Reconciliation Week is also Mabo Day. In the lead-up to Mabo Day on 3 June the Queensland government has reconfirmed its commitment to removing barriers to sustainable ownership on Indigenous land in Queensland. This commitment is one of the Queensland government's pre-election policies. We have taken early steps in working with relevant parties, traditional owners of the land, individual community members and other stakeholders to remove these barriers. We have identified that we need to address land tenure issues, which include ensuring traditional owners and Indigenous councils have the capacity to undertake land administration activities and resolving outstanding issues with legislation.

The government will continue to work with communities and community leaders who have been advocating for homeownership over recent years. Mabo Day 2012 is particularly notable in that it is the 20th anniversary of the High Court of Australia's 1992 judgement in the Mabo case which recognised that Indigenous people's rights to land and sea have not automatically been extinguished by the arrival of white Australians. Mabo Day will always be one of the most significant days on our national calendar. This decision to overturn the legal myth of terra nullius, which means land which belongs to no-one, became the cornerstone of the government's push for reconciliation. It recognised that Indigenous Australians may continue to hold rights over their land and their sea. I commend all of these events to the House and to all Queenslanders.