




Speech by

Hon. Glen Elmes

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

Hansard Thursday, 15 November 2012

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES, LAND TENURE

 **Hon. GW ELMES** (Noosa—LNP) (Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs and Minister Assisting the Premier) (2.32 pm): How can it be that in such an expansive and prosperous land as ours the ability to own land is still denied to some citizens? Ownership is not denied by circumstance but by long-established laws which determine that land in some communities cannot be bought and sold. These are the many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities where freehold title does not exist, or exists in just a few pockets.

In the previous sitting week, we celebrated the life of Mr Deeral, the former member for Cook. He saw almost 40 years ago a better future for Indigenous Queenslanders and had a practical vision for how it could be achieved. The improved lifestyle he saw was based on the ready availability of freehold land in Indigenous communities—freehold land which could be used for homeownership or business enterprise. He saw four decades ago that welfare was a self-perpetuating problem that created dependence and eliminated enterprise within communities.

There is an inextricable link between social problems and economic disadvantage. The more a community can be 'normalised' through employment and business opportunities, the better the chances of dealing with social problems like alcohol and substance misuse and violence towards women and children. This government's approach to addressing Indigenous disadvantage is to see jobs created and local economies developed which support homeownership and the creation of small businesses. If we can create jobs, most of the rest of the social problems in the community will take care of themselves.

I do not for a moment think that it will be a quick and easy task to make freehold land readily available across all Indigenous communities. There are significant issues for the communities to consider—issues which could have a dramatic impact on their lives. For example, a community that wants to make freehold land available must consider whether native title will be extinguished.

I understand that rights to land for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditional owners have been hard fought over many generations, so the question of extinguishment is a very big decision. Also, once a piece of land is declared freehold, it is then available to be onsold by the owner to someone else—even a buyer from outside the community. If people have their own home on freehold land, they are responsible for paying rates and the maintenance of the property. These are some of the issues to be considered and discussed at length so that each community can come to an informed decision.

We want to work with communities to identify what is best for each one and to what extent, if at all, freehold land can be made part of the community. The provision of freehold land is not a solution in itself but an option and is part of a wider strategy to address entrenched disadvantage within Indigenous communities.

Four decades ago, Mr Deeral had a vision. We owe it to him and all members of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to see that vision through.