




Speech By
Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

ADJOURNMENT SPEECH

Torres Strait Islanders, Traditional Adoption

 **Mr PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (12.07 am): The issue of traditional adoption practices in the Torres Strait Islands is a complex one that the former Labor government was investing time and resources into to ensure appropriate research and consultation was undertaken. This is an issue that cannot be solved overnight or with the flick of a ministerial pen. It asks that a modern society respect longstanding cultural practices while putting in place a framework of legal requirements that all of us need in our day-to-day lives. To form a solution it is obviously important that we understand the problem. Traditional adoption, or the practice of giving children, is relatively widespread in the Torres Strait. It is generally practised with an extended family group and involves the transferral of parental responsibilities for a child to someone other than the biological parents. While this practice has long been part of Indigenous culture, it is widely different from the practice of state sanctioned forced adoption, a shameful practice from decades ago which culminated in formal apologies in both the state and federal parliaments. Whilst we can respect the practice of traditional adoptions when conducted safely for the betterment of the child in question, it is very challenging to establish legal recognition of the new relationship. This is important in a modern society where proof of birth and next of kin requirements among others are commonplace in day-to-day activities such as acquiring a driver's licence, school enrolment, inheritance without a will, gaining a passport and dealing with a bank.

Because of the complexities of the issue, progressing it has been a long process. The issue was raised in prominence in the early nineties when the Queensland government was lobbied by the Kupai Omasker Working Party for Legal Recognition of Traditional Adoption, including making submissions to parliamentary committees in 2008. Before and during my time as minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partnerships consultation was undertaken in the Torres Strait Islands and northern peninsula area. Because around 75 per cent of Torres Strait Queenslanders live on the mainland, discussions took place in Cairns, Townsville, Rockhampton and in South-East Queensland which has significant populations of Torres Strait Islander people. Discussions centred on how to recognise the cultural importance of the practice and the legal realities. Importantly, this consultation included individuals that had experiences of traditional adoption, whether in giving or receiving a child or having been a child that was themselves given.

The consultations were about gathering information on how often traditional adoptions were occurring in the present day and how local communities recognise those adoptions. The consultation period revealed that the practice has continued, but is evolving as those communities evolve. These are complex issues that deeply affect the fabric of Indigenous communities in, most certainly, Torres Strait Islander communities. It was an issue that was being worked on towards the end of my last term in parliament. I hope it is something that is continually being worked on.

I am happy to stand corrected, but I am not aware that the LNP government has moved to progress this important issue to any large degree. I implore the LNP to use the opportunity of community cabinet in the Torres Strait to pick this up and get it back on the agenda and moving again. We all need to work collaboratively and consultatively to reach a consensus view, one which respects the cultural practices that predate European settlement while also recognising the legal aspects of these relationships.