




Speech By
Hon. Mark Furner

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Minister for Local Government and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Portfolio Responsibilities

 **Hon. M FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Minister for Local Government and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships) (2.29 pm): It is an honour to be appointed the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships. I acknowledge and thank my predecessor, the Hon. Curtis Pitt, for his commitment to closing the gap of disadvantage in the mortality, incarceration, health, education and employment of our nation's first people. These are matters that I had also been deeply involved in during my time as a senator for Queensland. It is an area that I am passionate about. After all, we have the nation's second largest population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander citizens.

Yesterday saw the release the ninth national *Closing the gap* report. It showed that Queensland is making positive progress on early education to put Indigenous Queenslanders on the path to a lifetime of learning. Enrolments in preschool programs among Indigenous Queenslanders have increased to 85 per cent—up from 63 per cent in 2014. There are more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people starting and completing their education than ever before. It is a generational change. Almost 95 per cent of year 12 Indigenous students are achieving their Queensland Certificate of Education. Queensland is also tracking above the national average for school attendance. I note in the midyear budget that the Treasurer announced funding support for the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Foundation to provide scholarships to keep students at school to year 12. The Palaszczuk government knows that participating in education is crucial to improving life chances and closing the gap.

Under the Making Tracks program the Palaszczuk government is spending more than \$200 million over three years for services and programs aimed at closing the health gap. The report shows that there are improvements in mortality rates from chronic disease, including cardiovascular disease. We are seeing reductions in smoking, but smoking is still 2.7 times higher than it is for non-Indigenous Australians. The life expectancy gap is narrowing, although we have more work to do to achieve longer term targets, particularly with mortality rates for Indigenous children aged under five.

We are working to close the gap on employment disadvantage, with the Palaszczuk government's launch of Moving Ahead, a whole-of-government strategy to increase the economic participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through jobs, training and business development opportunities. Having a job and participating in the economy benefits not only individuals but also entire Indigenous communities. We all have a role to play in helping to close the gap. As the minister, I am committed to working alongside Commonwealth, state and territory governments and local communities to improve outcomes for the nation's first Australians.