




Speech By
Hon. Mark Furner

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

Record of Proceedings, 16 February 2017

PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders

 **Hon. M FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Minister for Local Government and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships) (2.57 pm): Our nation has made excellent progress on the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, our First Australians. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the 1967 referendum. An overwhelming 89 per cent of Queenslanders voted in favour of amending the Constitution to include Indigenous Australians in the national census. Nine years ago this week, then prime minister Kevin Rudd delivered a national apology for the mistreatment of those who were the stolen generations.

We have come a long way. However, some regrettable mid-20th century attitudes remain. Over the Christmas period, I travelled with my son Troy, his wife, Daniela, and my two beautiful grandchildren, Xavia and Marley, from Cairns to Cooktown along the Bloomfield Track, through Cape Tribulation and onto the beautiful Wujal Wujal community. This is an area that you would be quite familiar with, Mr Deputy Speaker Crawford. We enjoyed the hospitality of the mayor of Wujal Wujal, Desmond Tayley. On the following day, departing that beautiful area, at the Cooktown airport I got a sense of the disturbing underbelly of mid-20th century attitudes still apparent in pockets of our diverse nation.

An older gentleman asked me what I had been doing in that part of the world. I said I had been to Wujal Wujal. His response was disturbing. He said, 'I don't like the colour scheme down there.' These are the words of bigotry and intolerance, cheered on from the sidelines by the dog whistlers of the far Right. Apart from describing the members opposite as 'very, very mediocre', it was LNP Senator George Brandis who stated, 'People have a right to be bigots,' in relation to section 18 of the Racial Discrimination Act. Then there is Pauline Hanson. Who can ever forget her 1996 maiden speech, when she said—

I have done research on benefits available only to Aboriginals and challenge anyone to tell me how Aboriginals are disadvantaged.

My commitment is to advancing reconciliation and to closing the gap of disadvantage among our Indigenous Queenslanders through practical measures to boost education, health, jobs and economic engagement. We shall never reconcile our nation, our state, our past until we respect our First Nations people. We must condemn prejudice and fear. It will never bring us together; it will only divide us. We share the same biology—the same 23 pairs of chromosomes. We are all one race, the human race.