




Speech By
Scott Stewart

MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

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HUMAN RIGHTS BILL

 **Mr STEWART** (Townsville—ALP) (12.24 pm): I rise today to speak in support of the Human Rights Bill and make a brief contribution to the debate. The Attorney-General in her introductory speech said that this year marks the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Like the UDHR, Queensland's human rights act will be a standard of achievement to which we all—government and citizens—should aspire.

It is about embedding human rights understanding in thinking about policy and in promoting them across our community. It is a statement of aspirations and principles, the right to which all human beings are inherently entitled. We must recognise them. We must respect them. We must do all that we can to ensure them. This is a collective responsibility that is inherent in the proposition that all people are of equal value and entitled to be treated equally. We must think about our actions and our relationships in the context of these fundamental human rights and be proactive, respectful and a compassionate culture.

For the past 2½ years I have been chair of the Queensland Social Cohesion Implementation Committee. It is a diverse group of people from across the state and filled with academics and recognised leaders within their communities. Most of the members were not born in Australia. In fact, one in every four Australians are born overseas.

Like it is titled, our role is to build cohesive communities across the state. It is not an easy task. Our motivation is driven by the need to ensure our communities create a sense of belonging for each and every member within them. Why do we do this? Queensland is a dynamic state which is home to more than five million people and visited by many more. As large and vast as our state is geographically, it is also diverse. This diversity brings many benefits to our state, including to our economy and to our social fabric.

The Palaszczuk government is committed to a fair, prosperous and equitable society that supports safe, vibrant and inclusive communities. We promote a society where everyone is respected and treated fairly and can make a positive and valued contribution. Violent and divisive events around the world and in Australia in recent years have highlighted how important it is to maintain and build connected and cohesive communities.

That is why the Palaszczuk government has committed \$5 million over three years to strengthen social cohesion in Queensland communities, led by the Queensland Social Cohesion Implementation Committee. Creating a sense of belonging for all and having welcoming and inclusive communities is the best defence in countering antisocial behaviours. Building belonging and resilience as a community takes effort and a joint effort at that. Everyone has a part to play in creating and upholding the social conditions that enable us to get along and prosper.

In many of the social cohesion meetings we have been discussing the possibility of a human rights act. By clearly articulating what the minimum standards are for every Queenslander empowers each and every one of us to build strong and resilient communities. This bill reflects the essence of the

work of the Social Cohesion Implementation Committee and provides a framework to shape and create inclusive communities where its objectives are to protect and promote human rights; to build a culture in the Queensland public sector that respects and promotes human rights; and to help promote a dialogue about the nature, meaning and scope of human rights.

Just last week my electorate team and I set up an information booth during JCU's O Week. Our focus of discussion with most of the young people who came along to the booth was around human rights. We had some great discussions on that day with some of the brightest minds.

Until we engage our community in understanding the diversity that exists within our own towns and cities, marginalisation will continue, fuelled by ignorance and fear and compounded by a lack of understanding. When our communities are split, divided and marginalised history has shown us time and time again that antisocial behaviour becomes the outcome. We cannot allow this to happen in our communities.

We start today in building cohesive communities that value the rich tapestry of our society forged through a human rights act that reflects the expectations of every individual living within our community. This bill does that. That is why I am commending the bill to the House.