




Speech By  
**Hon. Shannon Fentiman**

**MEMBER FOR WATERFORD**

---

Record of Proceedings, 8 September 2020

**MERIBA OMASKER KAZIW KAZIPA (TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER  
TRADITIONAL CHILD REARING PRACTICE) BILL**

 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development) (5.10 pm): I rise today to speak in support of this historic bill. I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today, the Turrbal and Jagera people, and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. I also want to acknowledge elders of the Torres Strait Islands: those here in the chamber today, my friends; those who are not with us today; and the elders who came before.

The words ‘meriba omasker kaziw kazipa’ from the languages of the eastern and western islands translates to ‘for our children’s children’ and today is about recognising the many generations of Torres Strait Islander children who have been raised under this traditional cultural practice. Torres Strait Islander traditional child rearing practice, or ailan kastom, allows children to be lovingly raised by close trusted family, friends or community members for a multitude of reasons, including strengthening family ties. The bill’s preamble recognises this custom as unique, ancient, integral and enduring. The lack of legal recognition, however, has caused legal barriers for Torres Strait children and families, barriers to everyday things that we take for granted, like having a passport or a driver’s licence, school enrolments, access to support services through Centrelink and even inheritance and succession.

Legal recognition of this traditional child-rearing practice will allow Torres Strait Islander people to access fundamental rights. This is a cultural practice that has kept children safe and loved for thousands of generations. It is traditional lore and it is our job as the lawmakers of all Queenslanders to make it law today. I am so proud that this bill is the first of its kind in Australia, and only one of few international examples that legally recognises a traditional custom such as this. In regard to the claims from those opposite that this has been a rushed process, I think that the elders sitting in the gallery today do not think it has been rushed. They have been advocating for this for over three decades and it is about time that we delivered this reform.

It has been a tremendous honour and privilege to serve as the ministerial champion for the Torres Strait since 2016. From my initial visit in 2016 for Mabo Day the issue of legal recognition of child rearing practices has been raised with me in so many meetings by so many passionate elders, community leaders, councillors, mayors, mums and dads, aunties and uncles. It has been a privilege, along with our incredible member for Cook, Cynthia Lui, who moved this historic bill in this House, to be an advocate for the Torres Strait community within the cabinet and within the government.

I remember one particular meeting at the DATSIP office on Thursday Island where a passionate group of Torres Strait women said to me, ‘Minister, we are Queenslanders and we are part of this country. Why do our laws not recognise us?’ These women were right, of course, and the recognition of this important cultural practice has been a long time coming. The fight for recognition has been going for three decades. I want to acknowledge the tremendous work of our eminent persons who assisted with the consultation on this bill: Aunty Ivy Trevallion, Alastair Nicholson and Charles Passi. Thank you for your leadership and your wisdom. Taking an enduring cultural practice and trying to make it fit into the Queensland legal system is not an easy task and we could not have done it without you.

I also want to thank the members of the Kupai Omasker Working Party, first formed back in 1990. I have been asked today to especially acknowledge and thank the late chair of the working party Uncle Steve Mam for his strength, wisdom and the long journey he embarked on, along with other working party members, to face so many challenges over the past 30 years. In the gallery today from the working party we have Tomasina Ahwang, Francis Tapim, Uncle Belza Lowah and, of course, Aunty McRose Elu, a member of the working party, my Torres Strait mother, my good friend. Aunty Ivy and Aunty Rose in particular have become my very dear friends. They have welcomed me into their homes, their hearts and shared with me so much of their knowledge and so many of their stories. I feel so blessed to know you and to have worked with you on this historic bill. I would also like to acknowledge the champions within this chamber who made this possible.

Of course it would not have happened without the member for Cook, Cynthia Lui—we are all so proud to have worked with you; the member for South Brisbane, Jackie Trad; Minister Craig Crawford; Minister Di Farmer; the Attorney-General; and, of course, our Premier who has visited the Torres Strait many times and listened and, most importantly, heard from community members about why this bill was so important. I want to acknowledge and thank the former government champion for the Torres Strait, Michael Hogan and his team—especially Fergus Hogarth, Tanja Morch and Megan Giles—who is in the gallery today; as well as all of my staff who have worked with me as ministerial champion: Cynthia Kennedy, Shane Bevis, Laura Fraser Hardy and Monica Irvine. We have done it, finally. We have done it together. Eso, au esoau. Thank you.