




Speech By
Christopher Whiting

MEMBER FOR BANCROFT

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**NATURE CONSERVATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION (INDIGENOUS JOINT
MANAGEMENT—MORETON ISLAND) AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (2.32 pm): I rise today to speak in support of the bill in front of us. Before I do, I will address a couple of issues raised by the member for Bonney. I know that some members of the LNP have been critical of the state government not providing infrastructure especially to Minjerribah. Can I say that Redland City Council may have wanted to do a better job in maintaining and providing infrastructure on Minjerribah. I know the members for Redlands and Capalaba would even say that they have perhaps neglected their custodianship of infrastructure on the island. If the LNP want to criticise a lack of infrastructure on the island, perhaps they should talk to their erstwhile candidate or future candidate for the seat of Bowman in the upcoming by-election there.

Ms Richards: She might be able to bring some value.

Mr WHITING: Thank you, member for Redlands. I will touch on the issues of clarity and communication later, but I want to say at this point that in order to get clarity and certainty you need trust and communication. I think we are getting a glimpse today of why there might be a lack of trust, certainly amongst Quandamooka people, with regard to the LNP if the behaviour we have seen over the last couple of years is consistent. Trust works both ways and communication works both ways, and I emphasise to the LNP that they perhaps need to take more care of that.

We have heard the reasons we have the bill here in front of us. In November 2019, the Federal Court made a native title consent determination recognising the claim to Mulgumpin. As part of that agreement, the state government and the Quandamooka people are working towards joint management of areas on Mulgumpin. As we have heard, 98 per cent of the island is protected under the Nature Conservation Act or Recreation Areas Management Act 2006. This is quite unique. We really do have a gem on Brisbane's doorstep. That is what the bill is about. The bill is not about examining the system of native title or passing judgement on those who can best manage the land. Those decisions have been made, and it is our role to make sure that that cooperation and those arrangements can go ahead and start.

As chair of the committee examining the bill, I felt it was very important to go out to Mulgumpin for a couple of days and have a good look at what we are dealing with. On our site visit we travelled literally the length of the island—the oceanside and the bayside—in four-wheel drives. We met QYAC at Cape Moreton. Standing near the lighthouse, they pointed out the cultural features of the landscape around us and we heard about the connection of that landscape to creation stories and the process of getting native title recognised. We heard about the work the rangers are doing in conjunction with QPWS rangers in managing weeds and feral animals and the early stages of the reintroduction of controlled burning, especially taking care of some highly significant tree species.

We also met residents and tourism operators in the rural fire brigade building at Bulwer. We found the residents and especially the tourism operators to be very respectful. They had some concerns but they wanted to know more about what was happening. At the end of the day—and this is what we have

not heard so far—they are very positive about the future of the island. They know that changes are coming, but I heard them saying, 'We want to work with the First Nations people and build up a better tourism experience for the industry in the area.' We met the owner and operators of Tangalooma, which is an incredible tourism resource in our region—another very special place on a very special place.

In talking about the report, I want to recognise the role of the member for Stretton in getting to this point. He chaired the committee that produced the report in the last parliament. I read his report very carefully and I commend him on his approach. I was especially guided by his approach to some of the more challenging aspects of the inquiry that arose. I urge everyone to read the foreword to his report. I think it will stand as a testament to his hard work over the years and will be a guide for chairs in this parliament for some years to come.

From conducting our examination of the bill and our site visit, I can talk about the beauty of Mulgumpin—of Moreton. On the site visit it became very clear what an absolute gem it is. Driving along the beaches, especially on the bayside—the blue water, the white sand, the towering dunes and the coastal forest—was breathtaking and beautiful.

We also learned about the cultural and archaeological heritage. We have not heard too much about this, but QYAC employ archaeologists. They talked about one investigation they did in a three-metre trench in a significant area. What they have found will make Mulgumpin the most important archaeological site in South-East Queensland, I have no doubt, and I look forward to seeing the papers that are published after they have been peer reviewed. I think they will show the depth of the culture and history of Mulgumpin and what an incredibly special place it is.

I have talked about the positive attitude of the tourism operators we met on the site visit. I will talk about the benefits of tourism as well. It is very clear that there is huge potential on Mulgumpin, on Moreton, especially with Queen's Wharf and international tourists eventually coming back.

Talking with the Quandamooka people, it is very clear that they have enormous capacity for managing their land. I acknowledge Uncle Bob Anderson who is in the gallery today and recognise his role as a claimant in this and a custodian of the stories that will be guiding the management of this land. There are an incredible number of highly skilled people amongst the Quandamooka people. There are a lot of PhDs amongst them. I acknowledge the member for Algeester, a very important Quandamooka person. They have successfully jointly managed the national park for over eight years and they have won awards for that.

I will briefly touch on the issues raised by the LNP. They demanded that there be openness and they demanded to see the ILUA. I point out that this is a confidential agreement registered in the Federal Court—an agreement negotiated over many years. It is clear that one of the parties did not want that confidentiality breached. For us to muddle into a confidential agreement lessens trust in the native title system and the courts in Australia. All sides need to know that their confidential agreements will remain confidential. They do not need state politicians deciding what is or what will remain confidential. It is not our plaything. It is a confidential agreement. If it were another corporation doing this, there would be no question about us not getting involved.

Mr Mander interjected.

Mr WHITING: See what I mean? It is a confidential agreement. For any other corporation it would be—

Mr Mander interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Gerber): Pause the clock. Member for Everton, cease your interjections, please.

Mr WHITING: The member for Everton's interjections highlight the LNP's ambivalent attitude towards this corporation. They have millions in reserves. The corporation has been given a clean bill of health continually. They have a camping business as well.

We have seen certain elements of the LNP try to portray this corporation as financially irresponsible or incapable of managing a business. If we look at the transcript of the hearing, we see that one of the first questions we had of a witness was about a QYAC officer and accusing them of doing something that was potentially illegal. That was in a parliamentary hearing. We are not going to have good parliamentary hearings or trust if these are the kinds of questions that get asked when we are examining these kinds of issues.

No other agency managing or involved in a national park or natural area would be continually called to justify their decisions, but the LNP think they can make this corporation jump through higher hoops. What we are seeing here is a failure of the LNP to properly grasp what native title is all about. If

members of the LNP want to talk about the angst being caused for the Quandamooka people then they need to talk about the angst that some members of the LNP are creating by the constant undermining of the Quandamooka people and their corporation. It is a disgrace.

I acknowledge the hospitality and the sharing of knowledge that occurred when our committee visited Mulgumpin. It was a wonderful experience to have that cultural landscape explained by the Quandamooka people and to see the pride of their rangers and cultural managers. I commend the bill to the House.