




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR WHITSUNDAY

Record of Proceedings, 21 February 2023

WORKING WITH CHILDREN (INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms CAMM** (Whitsunday—LNP) (6.06 pm): I want to commend the member for Traeger. I was not a member of this House when the member introduced previous bills or spoke on this issue, but I did have the opportunity to speak one-on-one with him about this issue. I also thank the committee for its work. I had the opportunity to sit in and hear evidence at hearings from some incredible people across our state, in particular some incredible Indigenous leaders.

I want to outline from the opposition's perspective that, while our shadow Attorney-General has said that we will not be supporting the bill because of all of the issues that have been highlighted, in particular around unintended consequences, I think what this bill does do is highlight a number of issues. Issue No. 1 is when the government presents a policy position and then enacts legislation around enhancing, for example, kinship care but then does not look at its own systems and processes that in fact inhibit the ability to increase kinship care across this state. The government makes announcements about how it wants to commit to Indigenous communities and that it wants to see investment and that it wants to see empowerment of those communities, yet the government's own processes and systems do not recognise those communities and the challenges that those communities are facing.

I had the privilege to travel with my colleagues to Far North Queensland late last year and in conversations in the community of Mapoon speaking with the mayor we raised this issue and I asked these questions: is this real? How does it impact her community? How does it impact her local government, noting that across many remote and Indigenous communities local government is one of the major employers within that community? Without a doubt she could testify that it is a major impediment. It is a major impediment for young people in the community. It is a major impediment for anyone who wants to further improve their circumstances. There is other legislation before this House where we talk about the fact that there is an over-representation of Indigenous women, yet the systems and processes that have not been reviewed or enacted upon from a report that was sitting for seven years in terms of the recommendations are those same processes that are impeding the ability for Indigenous women to be able to secure employment.

I note the contribution made by the mayor of Mornington which moved to tears not just me but many in the committee, in particular the commitment that he wanted to make to his community to contribute back to his community by supporting youth groups to ensure that those who need to see leadership and to deter them from potentially a path of crime. His own challenge in being able to obtain a blue card was extraordinary. In fact, if he did not have independent legal representation he would not have received the outcome that he needed. When we hear tragic stories of leaders in communities who have reformed their own lives, who are wanting to contribute to reform other lives, yet government processes are setting them back in their ability to do that, I think that is a government that has checked out.

The member for Traeger highlights some very important points. I know the committee only had a certain amount of time in areas, and they certainly covered quite a lot given their significant recommendations, but what we do not see quantified is the cost-benefit analysis of a blue card system versus what the alternative could be and what has been put forward by the member for Traeger. I also recognise that justice groups across the state differ in the way they interact and in their make-up. While I think they are a critical and important group to engage with, I highlight that each community is different. At times in this large decentralised state we forget that processes that are built down here in Brisbane do not necessarily fit the purpose that they are aiming to achieve.

I receive complaints across my electorate, as I am sure many do, around the time frames in the blue card system and the impact that has on employment more generally. As this bill highlights, that is felt no more greater than in Indigenous and remote communities. While the Attorney has tabled a response from the government, it is upon the opposition to work with the crossbench to hold the government to account on all of those responses and the recommendations that after seven years we still have not seen implemented. I commit to doing that across the portfolios I hold for the opposition, in particular child protection, where we see a system that is designed to protect children is in fact limiting the ability for community to connect and to protect children. I thank the committee members, in particular the member for Traeger, for highlighting this issue. I can only imagine his frustration. I empathise and make the commitment that I will continue to take this issue up in this House until it is addressed.