




Speech By
Charis Mullen

MEMBER FOR JORDAN

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PATH TO TREATY BILL

 **Mrs MULLEN** (Jordan—ALP) (4.46 pm): It is a special moment to rise and debate this important bill. As our Premier said in her introductory speech—

This is our chance to do what we should have done two centuries ago—to make a treaty or treaties with Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Our state's diversity is its strength. It is also home to two of the oldest living cultures in the world, but for too long we have not rectified past wrong and truly reconciled with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The bill before us is a tangible and real start.

Our government committed to supporting the establishment of an independent First Nations Treaty Institute that will develop the treaty-making framework and equip First Nations people to participate in future treaty negotiations. Importantly, our government accepts the need for a statewide truth-telling and healing process because we recognise the need to address injustice which has left permanent scars on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

As elected representatives, we all regularly participate in events where we are privileged to listen to welcomes to country or acknowledgements of country. Sometimes these rituals are raw and honest. They tell a difficult story; they share a challenging journey. They are important stories and we need to hear them and they need to be documented. Why is this important? As we heard this morning, don't ask 'Why?', ask 'Why not?' We need truth if we have any chance to achieve equal recognition and formal equality before the law for our First Nations people.

The bill will establish a First Nations Treaty Institute to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to develop and provide a framework to prepare for and then commence treaty negotiations with the Queensland government. It will also establish a Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry into and to report on the effects of colonisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. I would like to acknowledge the work of the minister and his department and also the Community Support and Services Committee for their considered work in the preparation and examination of this bill. I would like to echo and offer my support especially for recommendation 8, which is that—

... those responsible establish the Queensland Treaty framework from a positive position of equity, opportunity and self-determination, to recognise and value the aspirations, knowledge and skills of First Nations people for the betterment of Queensland and the broader Queensland community.

I note the minister's support for this recommendation which will be actioned.

I also wish to acknowledge work that has preceded the bill through the incredible efforts of the Treaty Advancement Committee which captured the major themes identified by the Queensland community such as reconciliation, respect, inclusion and self-determination. The Path to Treaty conversation began in 2019 with truth-telling and healing at the heart of its dialogue. We also need to build community understanding and empathy for First Nations truth-telling and for wider community acknowledgement of and understanding about these truths.

We can look across the ditch to the mature treaty system in New Zealand, where relations between the Crown and Maori have been governed by treaty since 1840. From the commencement of the Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975, treaty claims and disputes have been considered by that tribunal and negotiated by the Office for Maori Crown Relations. What is clear from the New Zealand experience is that enduring treaties are made with a strong mandate from the community and a framework that embraces continuous partnership, equity and opportunity.

The committee considered it essential for the integrity of the Path to Treaty process that the First Nations Treaty Institute, Treaty Institute Council and Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry are independent. The committee's view was that the bill before us has the correct balance between independence and accountability to First Nations people, non-Indigenous Queenslanders and the Queensland government. This will include that annual reports of the Treaty Institute Council should be tabled in the Queensland parliament.

My electorate of Jordan is the home of the Jagera, Yuggera and Ugarapul people, as well as the Yugambah people to the south. I am also fortunate to have an incredible school dedicated to First Nations students—Hymba Yumba Independent School. Hymba Yumba prides itself on being an innovative school deeply committed to the traditions of Indigenous culture, spirituality and identity. Its unique teaching philosophy is to instil in the local jarjums a sense of empowerment and cultural identity and familiarity which in turn provides them with a launch pad to successfully commence their lifelong journey of learning. Last month we were honoured to welcome the US Ambassador Caroline Kennedy to Hymba Yumba and, along with the federal member for Oxley, we were able to showcase the outstanding outcomes that are being achieved by our First Nations students. I truly and desperately want to see a better future for these jarjums, a future that is better than what their parents and grandparents have experienced.

We still have a long way to go with our First Nations people and genuinely closing the gap for our Indigenous communities. I truly hope that the Voice referendum will be supported later this year. This will be a vital step in true reconciliation. The bill before us is an important, indeed critical, step. Getting this right does create hope for a better future and a new beginning which we all hope will lead to, as Oodgeroo Noonuccal said, a 'glad tomorrow' for all Queenslanders. I commend the bill to the House.