



Speech By
Christopher Whiting

MEMBER FOR BANCROFT

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PATH TO TREATY BILL

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (6.00 pm): I also want to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we gather in this parliament today and the traditional owners of the land that I represent in this parliament, and that is the Gubbi Gubbi people.

I rise to speak in support of the Path to Treaty Bill. I also support the Voice, I support truth-telling and I support moves towards treaty. It is clear to me that voice, truth and treaty are supported by a strong majority of First Nations people. I welcome the LNP's support for this bill. It was with some interest that I listened to the shadow minister, who said that issues were complex. I reflected that, yes, the issues of disadvantage and potential solutions are complicated, but to me the purpose of what we are doing is clear, unequivocal and uncomplicated. This is the right thing to do.

Path to Treaty is the right thing to do because it deals with one of the most profound unresolved issues in our history here in Queensland, and that is that the colonial settlement of this land was not done on a legal basis. First, it was originally conducted on the basis that this land was terra nullius—that it belonged to no-one. It was a fiction at the time and the fiction was finally exposed in 1992 when the High Court brought down the Mabo judgement. Terra nullius was dead. Secondly, in Queensland in the 19th century the colonial settlement was contrary to 19th century legal doctrine, and it was recognised as such at the time. You can see that if you read Henry Reynolds' book *The Law of the Land*, which covered how Australia's colonisation stood in contrast to the legal doctrines of the time.

Let me be clear about what I believe: the settlement of the land in Queensland was in fact a seizure of the land, contrary to the legal doctrines of the day; it was conducted in the main by a military campaign carried out by the Queensland government through the use of local police forces; and the role of the Queensland Native Mounted Police, staffed by young men from around Australia who had been dispossessed and removed from their culture, was crucial to this military campaign. There have been many studies attesting to how the Queensland government wielded this force to dispossess the First Nations people or, as they put it at the time, dispersed with Snider rifles.

This story has rankled me for over 30 years when I first learned of the secret histories of Queensland, and it has rankled me even more since I became a member of parliament, for I know that it was a military campaign planned and conducted from George Street by our predecessors in this parliament—by the men whose seats we now occupy in our parliament. Our names are on an honour roll in parliament preceded by men who most probably were involved in massacres themselves. I welcome wholeheartedly the action by the Minister for Communities to open the archives and digitise the information about the mounted police. These stories are some of the issues that will be confronted on the road to treaty.

There are other reasons shared today on why treaty is the right thing to do. We heard from the Minister for Communities and the members for Cook and Bundamba that it is vital to reconciliation and that it is a shared journey. I agree that we must do everything to make a better future for all Queenslanders. That means doing all we can to close the gap for our First Nations people. I strongly

believe that treaty will be a crucial part of this journey. It will help increase self-determination for First Nations people. It will help to deliver even greater reconciliation. As the Minister for Communities said, this will mark another step along the way, another step on the journey.

One of the things I have learned today is the truly rich history of the First Nations people or traditional custodians in the Cairns region centred on Gimuy, the traditional name for the area occupied by this city. It is very clear from what we saw today that there are many nation groups here. I have no doubt that each possesses their own legal system and language and protects the recognised tenure of their land. Yet they are all connected through a kinship system, and these nations and the cultures are strong and alive today. Reflecting on all of the things I have learned from over 30 years and what I have learned today, does it not seem only fair that we start a treaty process with our First Nations people—because, as I said, it is the right thing to do.