




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MANSFIELD

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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Path to Treaty

 **Ms McMILLAN** (Mansfield—ALP) (2.33 pm): I am taking this opportunity to make my contribution to the Path to Treaty Bill given my absence due to illness during the last sitting week. I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet this afternoon. I acknowledge our elders past and present. I acknowledge you, member for Cook and Madam Deputy Speaker. I know that our future is in the hands of wonderful young First Nations leaders right across Queensland, many of whom I have had the honour of supporting during their schooling years. I acknowledge the members for Algester, Bundamba and Cook and congratulate the member for Algester as the Minister for Treaty, a role that I know she will perform with urgency, integrity, authenticity, passion and vigour. I also recognise the efforts and undeniable commitment of the member for Barron River, whose leadership ensured the success of this bill.

I am honoured to have led the critique and analysis of the Path to Treaty Bill 2023 in preparation for our collective debate in Cairns. I wish to congratulate every member of the Community Support and Services Committee and the work of the secretariat. We have all learnt so much during our journey and our experiences of the hopes of First Nations peoples. Whilst we have so much more to learn, our lives are the richer for having had this experience of leading the consultation on this bill. It is my hope that every Queenslanders will experience similarly as together Queensland learns of our shared history. Mr Wallabi Kuundabah-Saunders shared these words with me when the committee visited Woorabinda in a quiet moment—

When crimes go unpunished, the world becomes unbalanced.

He was referring, of course, to the injustices that First Nations peoples have suffered for more than 235 years of colonisation and the multigenerational trauma and disadvantage that has tormented Indigenous people throughout this time. Path to Treaty is our opportunity to overturn the wrongs perpetrated on our First Nations peoples by the horribly misguided iterations of the Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897. This act advocated the displacement of Aboriginal people to reserves, regulated their employment and perpetrated the most draconian form of social engineering, unleashing a state sanctioned process of dispossession, brutality and violence. This lasted 235 years.

Injustices continue for First Nations people today—reduced life expectancy, high incarceration rates, poor health, poor education and employment outcomes and low socio-economic status. I recall moments during my teaching and school administration career where the contrast between non-Indigenous children and First Nations children could not have been more stark. I am referring to not only the difference in educational outcomes but also the differences in the unacceptable school disciplinary absences and low school attendance rates. Sadly, these were statistics I was all too familiar with and I worked diligently every day to overcome the cataclysmic effect on school completion rates and access to further study and employment.

I specifically recall moments among many that helped to define for me this contrast. When I was principal of a low socio-economic school with a high percentage of First Nations children, I had organised a bus trip to the University of Queensland for all of my year 8 students and for the year 4 students from feeder primary schools for the children to experience university life and to build their education aspirations. Students were lining up to board the bus when a little year 4 Indigenous girl said to me, 'Miss, I can't go today. I don't have my permission slip.' I said, 'That's okay. I'll give mum a call.' The little girl responded, 'But, Miss, you don't understand. My mum said university is not for people like us, so there is no point in ringing mum.' I remember this moment so clearly and recall how deeply troubled I was at the views of this little girl and the beliefs of her family.

Further, I recall having many conversations with at-risk young people about the path they were on and the decisions they were making. I often would share time with these children attempting to identify their interests and aspirations, asking what jobs interest them, what their dreams were when they finished school. Often I would get a shrug of the shoulders. I would then ask, 'Who do you know that does a job that you might be interested in?' Sadly, it was all too common that these young people—the most vulnerable children—would share with me that they did not know anyone who works. Sadly, this is all too common. On the contrary, for us as people of privilege in this House, it is unlikely that we know someone who does not work. These were just some of the many examples I observed in my teaching career of intergenerational trauma, the impact of racism and prejudice on self-worth and self-efficacy and the harsh impact of colonisation.

(Time expired)