




Speech By  
**Dale Last**

**MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN**

---

Record of Proceedings, 10 May 2023

### **PATH TO TREATY BILL**

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (11.24 am): I rise to contribute to the Path to Treaty Bill 2023. Kathleen Ruska was born on 3 November 1920 at Bulimba in Brisbane. After her brothers were captured by the Japanese during the fall of Singapore in 1942, Kathleen enlisted in the Australian Women's Army Service and was trained as a signaller. She was promoted to lance corporal in 1943, the same year she married Bruce Walker. Despite their short marriage, many will know her as Kath Walker and many others will know her as Oodgeroo Noonuccal.

Oodgeroo Noonuccal's relevance to this bill comes in many forms. She held many positions of importance, received numerous awards, wrote the script for the *Rainbow Serpent* theatre presentation that was performed at World Expo 88 and created a place of learning that inspired thousands of schoolchildren and visitors who made the barge trip across Moreton Bay. In her poem, *All One Race*, Oodgeroo Noonuccal made the point that all people, regardless of their tribe or skin colour, are one family and questioned why we make wars. Her poem is about unity and bringing people together and that must be the emphasis of this bill.

I will not be opposing this bill because, as Queenslanders and Australians, we value unity. Unity is the basis of the great Australian trait of mateship and it is unity that held together Indigenous groups throughout history. Most of all, it is unity that will provide the foundation for our state and our country to move forward and to be better for everyone regardless of whether they are, as Oodgeroo Noonuccal wrote—

Black tribe, yellow tribe, red, white or brown.

I am extremely proud of my service to Queensland as a police officer and I am particularly proud of my service to remote and Indigenous communities. In fact, when I was stationed at Laura in Cape York I had one of two remaining blacktrackers, as they were officially known as that time, employed under the black trackers award. I want to put on the record today Thomas George, who was my tracker, and his service to that community and his value to me because I put my trust and faith in Thomas George. In fact, he saved my life on more than one occasion and he taught me so much. He taught me so much about Aboriginal culture and history. Then there was his father, Tommy George, well known in the cape as TG, and who could forget the role that he played in those communities in the cape?

I am also proud of my work on Palm Island, a community where we were able to dramatically increase school attendance, contributing to a better future for many Indigenous children. My service in those communities are times I will never forget. Luckily for me I have frequent reminders through people who lived in those communities or their families. Many speakers on this bill have spoken about the importance of truth-telling. The truth is that Indigenous people and Indigenous communities face challenges that many of us do not understand, but those challenges will not be addressed by division. Path to Treaty cannot be only about the spoken or written word; it must include action and those actions must address the truths currently faced by Indigenous people in communities.

Just this week we have met with the mayor of Yarrabah. Would honourable members believe that today in some places in that community they still do not have suitable drinking water or a reliable power supply? I make that point because if we are serious about going into those communities and making a difference, there needs to be a real commitment to dealing with those issues around health, education, housing and employment. When I was on Palm Island, 982 people on that island were unemployed—honourable members should think about that—they had never had a job. In the two years I was there we managed to get 96 of those people into full-time employment, and what a difference that made to those people and to their community.

When we consider that the average occupancy of housing on Palm Island at that stage was 25 people, we certainly appreciate what overcrowding in housing means. Think about that; they had to have shifts. It was like something off a submarine where there is a night shift and a day shift. When all the people who were out of a night-time came home in the morning and went to bed, everyone else got out of bed because they simply did not have enough housing.

It is a truth that Indigenous students in Queensland lag behind non-Indigenous children on every education measure, it is also a truth that Indigenous students in Queensland have a disproportionate rate of disciplinary absences from school when compared to non-Indigenous students and it is a truth that there is gross over-representation of Indigenous youths in our detention centres, and that needs to be addressed. I come back to early intervention. Why are we not doing more at those early stages when these kids are at risk to divert them from going into the justice system? We know that once they enter the justice system it is extraordinarily difficult to get them out of that system.

Path to Treaty must be about unity and about bringing Queensland together to achieve a better outcome for all. The member for Oodgeroo spoke of unity and of poetry. More recently, Jacinta Price during her maiden speech said 'it is time to stop feeding into a narrative that promotes racial divide'. As a proud Indigenous woman, Senator Price spoke about the hard work and sheer determination of people of all backgrounds in forging an Australia that we can all be proud of. She spoke of the need for Indigenous Australians, white Australians and Australians from myriad other cultural backgrounds to work in unity for what she called real and lasting change. All Queenslanders, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, can benefit from that change if we approach this process dedicated to unity, not division. While Senator Price's journey is to unite our nation, I call on this government and all members to unite our state for the benefit of all—and that means we need to start making a real difference in our Indigenous communities, starting today.