




Speech By
David Crisafulli

MEMBER FOR BROADWATER

Record of Proceedings, 9 May 2023

PATH TO TREATY BILL

 **Mr CRISAFULLI** (Broadwater—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (4.20 pm): I rise to support the Path to Treaty Bill 2023. I do so in the hope that it can be the catalyst for true accountability of government—a catalyst for materially improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in this state. Path to Treaty is a genuine opportunity for our state to improve the lives of Indigenous Australians. It is an opportunity I believe Queensland should embrace wholeheartedly. I believe in truth-telling, and to me that means telling it like it is. We need to be up-front. We cannot shy away from the real experiences of Indigenous Australians throughout history. We must tell the truth about the real challenges they are facing today.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the Treaty Advancement Committee for their efforts so far. However, we must be up-front about the shortcomings of this parliament when it comes to engagement for this process. That is the feedback we received throughout. Indeed, in relation to this bill it is apparent that the process has not managed to communicate and consult widely enough. That became apparent in my discussions with the member for Burnett. The opposition notes concerns raised in the public forums that poor notification had led to poor attendance. We are also aware of the concerns about the lack of knowledge of the bill at these forums. I worry that, if we are not properly engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, how will we as a parliament address the issues facing these communities, and there are issues we must all work together to fix.

Mayor Ross Andrews during an address to shadow cabinet just yesterday told me the three most important issues for his community: education, housing and employment. They are real issues that impact the everyday life of his community. In these areas Indigenous communities lag behind the rest of our state. In education, the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students when it comes to literacy is around 20 per cent of both years 7 and 9. In housing, approximately 20 per cent of Indigenous Queenslanders living in remote communities are living in overcrowded housing. According to data from 2021, Indigenous people are almost three times more likely to be unemployed.

In Indigenous communities across Queensland, basic infrastructure like water and sewerage lag behind the rest of Queensland. The health of Indigenous Queenslanders is vastly inferior to the rest of the community, with the life expectancy gap in Queensland currently 7.8 years for males and 6.7 years for females. The shadow minister, the member for Surfers Paradise, articulated why there have been failures over a long period of time that we must acknowledge.

These are just some examples of the disadvantage Queensland Indigenous communities live with every day. They are not new issues. In fact, in my time in public life I have travelled to every single Aboriginal shire council—all 17 of them. These issues are prevalent in communities across the state. If we are being up-front about it, they have been this way for a long time—too long. Herein lies the tragedy of the entrenched disadvantage of these communities. It is entrenched because there is no accountability. The issues have been talked about in this parliament, written about in reports, investigated in various commissions—and nothing changes. Why? Because no-one is being held accountable.

Path to Treaty offers an opportunity to address this—a fork in the road. Down one well-travelled path lies a discussion had for political purposes. It talks a big game but achieves little for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people—a path where political battlelines are drawn but ultimately ends with a decade wasted and no progress made. Down the other path is a treaty. It places accountability on this and future governments—a treaty that enshrines KPIs that materially address the disadvantage in Aboriginal communities on issues like health, education, housing, employment and infrastructure. This is a difficult path, a path that will mean governments can no longer act as though they are powerless observers. We are not. Governments are the bodies to enact change for these communities that deserve and yearn for change. It is a path where, working together, we can all shine a light on poor performance and ultimately lead to what we all want: real improvements in the lives of Indigenous Queenslanders. This indeed would be a worthy path to treaty.