



Speech By
Deb Frecklington

MEMBER FOR NANANGO

Record of Proceedings, 9 May 2023

PATH TO TREATY BILL

 **Mrs FRECKLINGTON** (Nanango—LNP) (4.06 pm): I rise to contribute to the Path to Treaty Bill 2023. The Path to Treaty Bill 2023 is foundational legislation designed to drive Path to Treaty. As a regional member of parliament and one who represents the Indigenous community of Cherbourg and many Indigenous people who live across the great electorate of Nanango, it is vitally important that members of my community understand what this bill means and represents. However, it is with deep sadness that I note that even the committee chair acknowledged that they did not get enough time to come to the electorate of Nanango and, indeed, even consult with the good people of Cherbourg, of Murgon, of Wondai, of Kingaroy and of Yarraman. They did not consult with those people because eight weeks simply is not enough. To think that the Labor government could just miss out Cherbourg beggars belief.

The objectives of the bill are to establish a First Nations Treaty Institute and a Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry. This will be complex. It will not be a single treaty. It will involve hundreds of treaties between various First Nations peoples and between First Nations peoples and the state government. That is why the government must get it right. It could start by consulting with the people of Cherbourg.

There are several concerns that have been raised about this bill which must be addressed. Firstly, it was noted at all public hearings by the committee, and I note that it has been said in this chamber here today, that there is a level of confusion between the federal Voice to Parliament debate and the lack of knowledge of the Path to Treaty Bill. In a recent article in my local paper, the *Burnett Today*, our mayor of Cherbourg Aboriginal Council Elvie Sandow, said—

Our community is saying they're actually getting confused ... even with the Path to Treaty ... it's confusing our people.

Mayor Sandow says her Council is trying to get clarity around the Path to Treaty, let alone the propose 'Voice to Parliament'.

This was supported by the Local Government Association of Queensland who shared this direct feedback from local councils—

A key area of confusion is how the State Treaty interacts with the Federal Voice. The lack of clear communications around these elements is resulting in many to not know about the Treaty unless they are explicitly involved in the process.

The article goes on—

One of the biggest challenges is a lot of people don't know what the Treaty is and where it has come from. There is real uncertainty as to where the concept of specifically establishing a Treaty Institute or Truth Telling Inquiry came from. Noting that the proposal seems more reflective of SEQ rather than all regions more broadly.

It was in the parliamentary chamber in Brisbane during the last sitting week when a minister of this government, the minister for Indigenous affairs, said that the communities are not feeling heard by the government. Why is the minister not listening to communities such as Cherbourg? Why is he not listening to the good people of my electorate and those of all the other Indigenous communities who did not have the opportunity to contribute to this committee process, which went for eight measly weeks? What is the government trying to hide? What do they not want to listen to?

That leads me to the complexities the Path to Treaty will experience as it must represent the whole of Queensland and not just the louder voices in the south-east. The future Treaty Institute must consider how to effectively engage all of Queensland. There is merit in suggestions that subcommittees of the institute be created for West Queensland, North Queensland, Central Queensland and South-East Queensland. There are huge complexities and geographical challenges and we all know that. Once again, the LGAQ shared many comments from local councils and I again note the shortness of time.

In relation to the limited time for consultation, this is a historic piece of legislation, yet the Labor government chose to allow the committee only eight weeks to consider the bill. That is an extremely tight time frame. Again, I note that the time line was so tight that they could not even go to Cherbourg. At most public forums participants raised the lack of information. Of course, given the short time line, attendance was poor. I have already noted that no public forum was held in Cherbourg, which was very disappointing. Given that the Path to Treaty process has been in development supposedly since 2019, a more realistic committee review period would have allowed for better engagement that fostered more respect and trust in the process.

The bill proposes to establish a statutory body to progress the process and it is to be called the Treaty Institute. There was overwhelming feedback that the word 'institute' is not appropriate and should be changed. I support that recommendation based on the evidence that was given.

The LNP opposition clearly cannot trust the Labor government to administer anything let alone this bill. Let us look at the last few years in Queensland and the Closing the Gap annual reports. There are many examples of Closing the Gap targets that are simply not on track. In health, closing the gap in life expectancy by 2031 is not on track. Instead, in Queensland the life expectancy gap is currently 7.8 years for males and 6.7 years for females. The significant and sustained reduction of suicide in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples towards zero, again, is not on track. The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children assessed as developmentally on track in all five domains of the Australian early development census, again, is not on track. In education, last year's budget showed significant failures to reach learning outcome targets for Indigenous students across all year levels in reading, writing and numeracy. In housing, to increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in appropriate sized housing by 2031, again, is not on track. Approximately 20 per cent of Indigenous Australians in remote communities live in overcrowded households. That is not on track under this Palaszczuk Labor government.

Many times in the chamber I have spoken about the crime issue. Youth crime is seriously affecting the South Burnett and Cherbourg. Again, I reiterate the words of Mayor Elvie Sandow who, late last year, spoke out about her community being outraged, frustrated, frightened and fed up. She said—

We wish to make it known we do NOT in any way condone car theft.

We share our community's frustration and disgust at those who are endangering the lives of not just themselves and their friends, but our Gundoo, elders, uncles and aunties who live here. You are not a hero or clever, stealing cars, speeding and skidding through the streets ...

You are not just giving yourself a bad name, you are giving our Cherbourg community a bad name and reputation.

My communities of Cherbourg and the South Burnett just want to be heard by this government. They want to be heard on the issues that are important to them on a day-to-day basis: housing, crime, health, education and the cost of living. Those are the issues that are affecting my communities. The minister himself said that the Indigenous communities of Queensland are not being heard by this government. It is about time that the Palaszczuk Labor government stopped navel gazing and started listening to our communities.