




Speech By  
**Hon. Di Farmer**

**MEMBER FOR BULIMBA**

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**PATH TO TREATY BILL**

 **Hon. DE FARMER** (Bulimba—ALP) (Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development) (11.59 am): I rise to speak to the Path to Treaty Bill 2023. I acknowledge the Gimuy Walubara Yidinji people and the Yirrganydji and Djabugay people of this region. I grew up on Bieli country. I acknowledge the First Nations people who are here today in the gallery. I acknowledge the member for Algeester, the member for Bundamba and yourself, Deputy Speaker, the member for Cook, the three First Nations members of this government who have helped to bring us to this point in so gracious, so patient, so heartbreaking but so resolute a manner, gently exhorting us but with such determination that we reframe who we are as a state and as a people.

I think all of us are speaking to this bill with a great sense of moment, knowing that we are making history this week, and I personally feel so proud that we are doing that. When we pass this bill we will be embarking on a path to treaty with First Nations people. We are saying we will understand our history, we will speak the truth of it, we will be more respectful, we will be more inclusive, we will walk as one. We know there will be a number of things put in place as a result of this bill to make that happen and I will not speak specifically to those, but I note the Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry, which I am sure will be an emotional, gut-wrenching but necessary experience for so many. We are here today as the result of many years of hard work, of committees and processes, to get us to this point. I acknowledge that a number of people involved in those processes are here today.

I think my own journey in understanding the truth about the history of our treatment of First Nations people probably reflects the journey of many other Queenslanders. The Australian history that I learnt growing up was that Captain Cook came and 'discovered' Australia in 1770 and he civilised the 'natives' and that that was the beginning of Australia. If you asked me about Burke and Wills, Matthew Flinders, Abel Tasman and the like I was on it. If you asked me about the oldest continuous living culture in the world and our treatment of that culture I would have had absolutely no idea, but I have been on a journey ever since to learn.

Fast forward to 2017 when, as minister for child safety, youth justice and prevention of domestic and family violence and minister for youth, I was faced with some terrible truths about the over-representation of First Nations people in all of those systems, about entrenched disadvantage, inherent bias, intergenerational grief—I learnt that grief is epigenetic, that children are born with that grief. I became Ministerial Champion for Aurukun, which is possibly one of the greatest privileges of my life. I learnt that Aurukun was established as a mission in 1904 by herding up Aboriginal people from a large surrounding area, including people from five different family clans who had no relationship to each other. It was ruled for 40 years by a chief protector. With the coming of the missionaries children were confined to dormitories to isolate them from the influence of their people. I met Auntie Martha Koowarta, whose husband John was known as the 'Mabo of the mainland'. In seeking to buy back the land of his birth at Archer River in Cape York, he had to take the Bjelke-Petersen government to the High Court to prove that the Whitlam government's new Racial Discrimination Act was constitutional. He won and then Bjelke-Petersen, out of 'spite and prejudice', declared the property a national park to ensure that no-one could ever own it.

In the last six years since learning the most confronting truths about our treatment of First Nations people, walking alongside me have been First Nations people who have been so patient and so tolerant of me. They have taught me so much and were full of hope that we would always come to the point where we are today. I want to acknowledge Mick Gooda, Aunty Judith Ngakyunkwokka, Aunty Harriet Pootchemunka, Aunty Martha Koowarta, Aunty Ena Koongotema, Mayor Keri Tamwoy at Aurukun and the many others. I acknowledge Aunty Rachel Atkinson, the chair of the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak, who, when I first became minister, scolded me very early on, saying stop talking about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in a deficit model, please talk about our strength and our hope; talk about what we have ahead of us.

As a result of all of the First Nations people who have walked alongside all of us we are here today and we are promising that we will be as one, that we will understand the difficult truths, that we will tell those truths and that we will have a path to being one Queensland. I want to recognise the minister and the time he spent with me to make sure I understood this process, but also the Premier for taking leadership in bringing this bill to the House. I quote the minister in his second reading speech—

I also recognise that the Path to Treaty process is built on the enormous resilience of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the strength drawn from their rich history, their culture and their knowledge.

We speak to that strength.