




Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR MCCONNEL

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PATH TO TREATY BILL

 **Hon. G GRACE** (McConnel—ALP) (Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing) (3.20 pm): I rise to support the bill. As the Premier just said, it is great to be in Cairns to debate this bill. It is no fluke that that happened. We purposefully acknowledged that this would be a great place to debate the bill. I acknowledge the Yagara and Turrbal people from the inner city of Brisbane, where I live and where I was born. I also acknowledge the Cairns and district traditional owners and pay my respects to their elders past, present and, of course, emerging in our wonderful schools. Many of those students have visited the parliament here in Cairns.

I must say how disappointed I was that when I was a young girl—and I used to walk from All Hallows up Boundary Street to Spring Hill—I did not learn the history of Boundary Street. Uncle Bob Anderson explained to me the true significance of the naming of that street. It fell on me like a tonne of bricks when he explained it to me. As a young girl, I had no idea what Boundary Street actually was to the First Nations people in our community.

The preamble of the Constitution of the United States refers to the ideal of forming a perfect union. It is a noble aim that suggests that working to build a unified and cohesive nation and society is always a work in progress but that we need always to aim for the stars. The phrase was given fresh attention in 2008 with the famous speech of the same title by the then presidential candidate Barack Obama. While we often try to avoid comparisons with the US, I like to think that the idea of reconciliation in Australia is, at least in part, an equivalent concept to that of a more perfect union, that is, the idea and aim of working together with First Nations people for a true and lasting reconciliation that properly accounts for what has happened in the past and charts a positive way forward for the future.

I am so proud to stand beside our Premier, Annastacia Palaszczuk, and this government on the path to treaty. This bill is an integral part of reconciliation with our First Nations people. As the Premier has said many times, and just said again, there are rare moments in time that come along perhaps once in a generation when we have the opportunity to be true agents of change. As a parliament, we must take that opportunity with gusto. Do not talk about what still needs to be done. Do not talk about how everything is not perfect; it is never going to be in this world. However, when you are given the ball you run with it. This is one fantastic ball and we are running with it. This is a wonderful opportunity because if we wait and sit on the fence and whinge and whine then we are not going anywhere.

Mrs Frecklington: Like you are doing now.

Ms GRACE: I take that interjection from the expert on whingeing and whining, the member for Nanango. The bill before the House is designed—

Mrs Frecklington interjected.

Ms GRACE: If you want to keep interjecting, please do so. The bill before the House is designed to drive Path to Treaty. It does this by establishing two key things: the First Nations Treaty Institute, which is a statutory body—

Mrs Frecklington interjected.

Ms GRACE: Madam Deputy Speaker, I heard the word 'bullying' as I was just talking. I take offence and I ask the member for Nanango to withdraw such a term.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I withdraw and I rise to a point of order. I found the comments by the minister personally offensive and I ask her to withdraw.

Ms GRACE: I withdraw. The First Nations Treaty Institute will be a statutory body that is independent of the Queensland government with powers and functions to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to develop, co-design and provide a framework to prepare for, and then commence, treaty negotiations with the Queensland government. The Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry will inquire into and report on the effects of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The bill responds to calls from generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Queensland for a formal agreement, a treaty or treaties, that recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the original custodians of the lands, waters and air; an agreement that provides a just and realistic foundation for a reframed relationship; an agreement that delivers broad-ranging substantive outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the wider Queensland community.

As other speakers have said, this will not be easy but it is something that needs to be done. Truth-telling is fundamental to the path to treaty. The path will not be easy. The path will not be perfect. The path will not be everything to everyone. However, it is a path. It is the first step and we must take it to move forward as one great nation with reconciliation at its heart. As I said, the key elements of the bill will provide the foundation for a true and lasting reconciliation that properly accounts for what has happened in the past and charts a positive way forward. I am proud to be part of a Labor government that is going down this path. I will wholeheartedly be on that path with all in this chamber.

As we embark on this path, I know that education will play a key role. Education is the key. Culture and inclusion need to be part of our schooling system. Earlier this year I had the pleasure of meeting with the co-chairs of the Path to Treaty independent interim body, Sallyanne Atkinson and Cheryl Buchanan. I pay tribute to the sterling work both have done in getting us to this point. When we met, Cheryl made the point that language and education are critical to culture and identity and that true First Nations history in our schools is also very important. I commit that we will continue to review and update our curriculum so that a true history can be told in our schools.

I commend the work of our proud members of parliament Minister Enoch, the member for Bundamba and you, Madam Deputy Speaker, the member for Cook. I also commend the member for Mansfield and the committee on the work that they have done. I commend the Premier, who has led us to the historic Path to Treaty Bill which we will soon pass in this House. On 27 May 1967, 91 per cent of Australians voted 'yes' to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples being counted in this country. Their 60,000-year history was acknowledged in 1967 and 91 per cent voted in favour. All I ask is that we vote the same way: 'yes' for a voice. We counted them and now we need to give them a voice. This is an historic moment. I am so proud to be a part of it with you, Madam Deputy Speaker, my other colleagues, the Premier and others in this House. I commend the bill to the House.