




Speech By  
**James Lister**

**MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS**

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Record of Proceedings, 9 May 2023

**PATH TO TREATY BILL**

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (6.37 pm): I rise to make a contribution on this bill. I am proud to say that I will be supporting it, however I would like to make sure that my contribution here is reflective of the kinds of views expressed to me by the people who have elected me in Southern Downs, and it will not come as any surprise to members that I am prepared to do that in a fairly frank way. I think the bill is a good bill. It is necessary that we move forward. It is necessary for people whose stories have not been told and for the hurt that they have experienced which has not been acknowledged to be acknowledged.

Having said that, the people of Southern Downs expect us to have results. One of the things that people come to me regularly and say is that we have spent a long time trying to address the disadvantages that Indigenous people experience in our country—life expectancy, health, employment, education—all of those kinds of things. I think I am not alone in wondering: where has all the money gone? Where has all the work that we have done ended up when we still have a situation where our Indigenous fellow citizens have such poor prospects in life and in employment and so forth? I could summarise that by saying that there is a suspicion about big government, a suspicion about big programs and big talk, and an understandable concern from people in my electorate as to whether or not this process—this bill effectively serves as an enabling bill—will result in action that we can be proud of.

A common complaint that the opposition has had, along with many other community groups, is that this bill did not experience the degree of public input that it might have had there been a decent amount of time for consideration. A number of submitters were explicit about this. It is a disappointment that we had the Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action, the Local Government Association of Queensland, the Queensland Mental Health Commission, YFS Legal Community Legal Centre, the Queensland University of Technology, the Queensland Indigenous Family Violence Legal Service and the Australian Lawyers Alliance, and I know a number of speakers before me, highlight concerns about how Indigenous communities appear to have not been adequately consulted and were not fully aware of the implications of the bill, and therefore it would stand to reason that their voices have not been appropriately heard.

I would like to think that, in spite of the paucity of consultation and the relatively truncated period for public consultation given the enormous importance of this bill, we will see benefits from it. I remain vigilant and inquiring as to how the processes that will be enabled by this bill will go ahead. I want to make sure that those Indigenous people whose circumstances are in most desperate need of improvement get that improvement. In saying that, I am confident I speak for the vast majority of people in my electorate of Southern Downs.

I want to make a couple of observations about some of the things that have been said in the debate so far. The opposition has copped some criticism from the government for our members taking umbrage at the inadequate amount of consultation, which was also expressed by some of the important

submitters. The member for Bundaberg was critical of that. I would say: does the government expect us to rejoice in this? Does the government expect the opposition to say nothing about how legislation like this, as so much legislation before it, has experienced a lack of consultation or, in the case of some amendments, no consultation at all? That is our job. The government and the outcome would be the better for being open and allowing the community to have due opportunity to contribute to bills like this.

I also notice that the Minister for Water made an observation correctly, a good observation, that there is Indigenous water provided for in a number of water projects. That is cold comfort for the people in my electorate of Southern Downs, for the Githabul people, who would have access to 200 megalitres of Indigenous water if the Emu Swamp Dam project were to go ahead. When we are talking about improving the situation of Indigenous people and listening to them and having practical outcomes which benefit them, you could start right there. It is not just about talk. It is not just about important people being on their soapbox. It is about the people on the ground having access to the benefits that this process is supposed to provide.

I would like to acknowledge the Indigenous people in the electorate of Southern Downs that I represent: the Githabul people who are on the eastern side of Southern Downs and the Bigambul traditional owners around Goondiwindi. I think it is also important to acknowledge the Indigenous community of Toomelah, which is just over the border in New South Wales and for whom Goondiwindi is their centre of interest: the Goomeri nation. The Toomelah settlement is on their land. I am not satisfied that those groups are sufficiently aware of or have had sufficient opportunity to help shape this bill. I think that is disappointing given that it is supposed to be for their benefit among others.

I would like to sum up by saying that I acknowledge that there have been some incidents and happenings in our past of which we should be ashamed. In becoming a member of parliament after a relatively sheltered career as an officer in the Australian Defence Force, I have come across more of that. I have met Indigenous people of consequence who have patiently explained to me how their lives and their culture are affected by what has gone before us. For that reason I can understand why it is important that the wrongs of the past and the experiences of people who have suffered in the past need to be acknowledged and fleshed out. I agree with that.

I urge all concerned to ensure that this process results in kids going to school, families being healthy and Indigenous people having work and having the opportunities that we want them to have, that all Australians and Queenslanders have. As I say, I support the bill. I hope that it will be the start of a new type of success in addressing the disadvantages that Indigenous Australians and Queenslanders experience. I will be very vigilant and inquiring about progress as we go on.