




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

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PATH TO TREATY BILL

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (11.32 am): I am pleased to speak in support of the Path to Treaty Bill today. I begin by acknowledging the original custodians of the lands we are gathered on and by paying my respects to elders past, present and emerging. I thank the local people for their welcome here yesterday. There was a lot of truth-telling in that welcome, and I thank them for their commitment.

This is an historic piece of legislation. I am incredibly proud to be part of a government that is driving this legislation forward. I acknowledge my three First Nations colleagues who are here—Minister Leeanne Enoch, the member for Bundamba and you, Madam Deputy Speaker Lui—for the role that they play in this place. I often bear witness to the weight of responsibility they carry, but I thank them for their commitment and determination to improve outcomes in the lives of First Nations people. I thank Minister Craig Crawford for this bill. I know that he has done an incredible amount of work on this. I also acknowledge the committee chair, Corrine McMillan. She puts her heart and soul into everything that she does, but this bill particularly meant a lot to her and I know that she would love to be here today to share with us.

Path to Treaty acknowledges the impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Queensland. It recognises their pain and suffering, their marginalisation, disempowerment and dispossession of lands, language, culture and traditions. Path to Treaty seeks to build a better future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people—one that addresses past injustices and the ongoing social and economic injustices that they continue to endure today. We recognise that there is still a lot more work to be done to close the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Path to Treaty is a key part in helping to close that gap.

In 2023, the average life expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is still lower than that of non-Indigenous people. First Nations adults and children are still over-represented in our criminal justice system and First Nations children are over-represented in our child protection system. The truth-telling and Path to Treaty processes will provide measurable economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and for the Queensland community in general. Path to Treaty will help more Indigenous Queenslanders gain more knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history in Queensland and improve our understanding of the injustice inflicted upon First Nations after white settlement.

There are still so many gaps in people's understanding of how First Nations people were treated for much of the past 235 years. Decades of forcibly removing Aboriginal people from their land, their culture, their customs, their resources and their language had incredibly traumatic consequences that are still tragically felt by many Aboriginal communities today. Even in our own towns and regions, many of us do not even know—nor have ever been taught—the rich and unique history of First Nations people who were the custodians of our land for tens of thousands of years. Many Ipswich people know, for example, of Ipswich's white history. We know about the local coalmining industry, its railway workshops and its notable politicians, sportspeople, artists and performers, but not many Ipswich people know a

great deal about the history of our local First Nations people. That is why I deeply value the relationships I have built with local elders. I am completely in awe of their commitment to truth, culture and education. It has not been an easy path for them; it is still not an easy path for them. I know that Path to Treaty is the right step for us as a government because it is something they have been working on for as long as I have known them.

Path to Treaty is all about accepting and acknowledging both the good and the bad of our history and working towards creating a new future together. This bill will establish the First Nations Treaty Institute and the Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry. The Treaty Institute will lay the foundations for negotiating a treaty or treaties and the Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry will strengthen and enrich our state's First Nations history by inquiring into and reporting on the effects of colonisation on First Nations in Queensland.

As the Premier stated in her outstanding speech earlier this year at the Path to Treaty event, Path to Treaty signals to the rest of Australia and to other nations that Queensland is ready and willing to confront that past and to listen to the painful stories that need to be told. But we cannot right the wrongs without recognising those wrongs. I acknowledge the member for Traeger's contribution. He was quite cynical about this bill and whether it will have a positive outcome for First Nations people, but I think the Premier summed it up when she said that we cannot right the wrongs and that we will keep seeing history repeat itself unless we recognise those wrongs and have honest conversations about them.

History will be made this year as we vote as a nation on the Voice to Parliament and the Queensland government commits to Path to Treaty. In 2023 we have a unique opportunity to commit to reconciliation, healing and truth-telling, share our past history—both good and bad—and work towards creating a better future together.