




Speech By
Jimmy Sullivan

MEMBER FOR STAFFORD

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PATH TO TREATY BILL

 **Mr SULLIVAN** (Stafford—ALP) (12.33 pm): I rise in strong support of the Path to Treaty Bill 2023. In doing so, I pay my respects to the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today here in Cairns. I thank them for their generous and warm welcome and welcome to country yesterday. I also acknowledge the traditional owners of the community that I am privileged to represent on the north side of Brisbane. I pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging and do so in the spirit of social, legal and cultural justice and true reconciliation.

It is with great honour that I rise in Cairns to support this bill today. The path to treaty has not been easy, nor will the path ahead be easy, but I am proud to be part of the Palaszczuk government in delivering this historic reform. I thank the minister for his hard work in this area. I particularly thank him for his approach and his support in engaging the community on this important issue, which included public engagement in little old Stafford. My view is that as elected members we all have a role to play in leading community discussions on important issues like this. I have taken the view that it is not just about engaging First Nations members of my community but also about trying to bring people with us.

Of course I welcomed many First Nations people to my forum, including Cheryl Buchanan from the interim panel, who was fantastic, along with members of the Noonga Reconciliation Group. MPs might remember Kaia from Wavell State High School, who presented the beautiful students' reflection at the event on the Speaker's Green last year. Kaia and her family were also very generous and participated in my local forum, so I thank them for that. As I said, with all due respect to First Nations people in this parliament and in my community, the point is that it is actually much broader than thinking this is solely an Indigenous issue. This is about all of us; this is about our intertwined history. To that end, our local forum included school principals, students and church leaders. It was hosted by the Salvation Army. There were members of community sports groups and many more because this is about all of us and our intertwined history. This is about our now shared identity. The reality is that it will likely be confronting for many of us, and so be it. This is about telling the truth of our shared history with the hope that it helps us all create a better collective future. I thank First Nations Australians for the generosity they have extended in seeking to do this. I am privileged to do my part in taking that hand of friendship.

While considering the momentous reforms this bill represents I reflected on my own journey and education on these issues. I consider myself lucky to have grown up in a household where the notion of reconciliation was a genuine topic of discussion—not just with Dad, who served in the Goss government and did so much to reconfigure the relationship between the state and Indigenous Queenslanders—but particularly with Mum, who was a member of the north side reconciliation group. It is a great privilege to be here in my capacity as an MP to progress this bill. As a primary school student in grade 4 or 5 I remember my interest being spiked by the frontier wars of North America. I was really hooked on Native American history. It is fair to say that one of the most influential books in my education was *Bury my Heart at Wounded Knee* by Dee Brown. While the history and stories of the Sioux, Cheyenne and Comanche come to me with such ease, in my later education I realised that it

was shocking that the same could not be said for our own Australian and Queensland history. Of course that includes the significant impact of colonisation and the reality of frontier expansion here in Queensland.

Through this process and the federal referendum—I acknowledge the remarks of the member Springwood, who talked about the parallel processes we are facing this year—we are finally recognising the basic truth that for tens of thousands of years Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were the original inhabitants of this vast continent. The Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry will be difficult, but it is important to learn where we have come from, who we are as a collective people and where we are going. The institute to support the readiness and preparation for treaty negotiations is important, and I thank the minister for delivering that as well.

My first professional introduction to this space was as a young law graduate finishing my associateship in the courts. Trying to inform myself, I volunteered for native title experience. I was nominated to go to the Yamatji land and sea council in Geraldton, Western Australia, so I had experience working on ILUAs, the substantive Federal Circuit Court application itself. When I think back to those days, when I had a full head of brown hair, it is an absolute honour to be here today to progress something so meaningful in that space.

I want to touch on some of the faux opposition to some of these reforms—that we are being too high level, that we are not being practical, that somehow these historic reforms are at the expense of practical reforms. If I can paraphrase Dean Parkin, the director of the Voice to Parliament, creating avenues for First Nations communities to have a role in how their lives are run is absolutely practical. That is what we are doing through treaty, that is what we are doing through truth-telling and that is federally what we are doing through the Voice. It is absolutely about enabling First Nations Australians to have control and agency over their own lives and their own communities, and nothing could be more practical or meaningful.

I am very proud to serve in a caucus with Minister Enoch, the member for Bundamba and the member for Cook. I am very privileged to be here alongside them. I thank the minister and his staff. I thank the member for Mansfield for her significant work in this space as well as the committee members. I give a particular shout-out to those eminent Queenslanders who did so much of the heavy lifting: the members of the exploratory committee, the members of the interim panel, the supporters of the Voice and so many more—I think I saw Mick Gooda here today. I thank them all for their hard work. We stand on your shoulders, and we thank you for getting us to where we are today. We are so proud to be part of this experience. I commend the bill to the House.