



Speech By
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PATH TO TREATY BILL

Mr McCALLUM (Bundamba—ALP) (3.45 pm): First Nations and non-First Nations Queenslanders are together, and we have been together for a couple of hundred years now. Our lives, our stories and our songlines have been intertwined for generations, and they will be forever more. This is a simple but powerful fact. It is also a cornerstone of our Path to Treaty Bill.

It is fair to say that Queensland, like other states and territories in Australia, has a long and complex history when it comes to the relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Colonisation brought with it policies and actions that have resulted in deep trauma that has permeated through generations. The forced removal of children from their families, the dispossession of land and the suppression and almost complete erasure of culture and language: these are uncomfortable truths of our shared past but ones we must face together. This is why there have been growing calls and momentum towards reconciliation by so many for so long. With this bill we mark one of the most significant milestones towards reconciliation in Queensland's history. With this bill the Palaszczuk government is delivering on our commitment to reframing the relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through a shared path to treaty.

Treaty is a manifestation of a commitment for government to work with our First Nations people, to face the injustices of the past together and to make the most of our future. Treaty acknowledges the fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the original inhabitants of this land—this country we call home and our deep and abiding connection to it. This bill and the treaty framework it provides for will help directly and meaningfully address the ongoing impacts of structural, systemic dispossession and disadvantage that even today continues to result in lower life expectancy, higher rates of incarceration and lower levels of education and employment.

A full response to systemic racism and structural disadvantage needs effective levers to drive systemic change. Policies and service provision, as important as they are, can only do so much. They are not the complete solution. We know this to be true by looking at the evidence of past attempts to close the gap, including those of the present day.

Treaty provides a path for addressing these issues. Treaty can facilitate generational change. It can take the hurt, pain and suffering of the past and lay down a path to a positive future for our coming generations. Treaty builds stronger, more respectful relationships between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous peoples in Queensland through the dialogue and the understanding that it inherently brings with it.

To be clear, the path to treaty is not an easy road, but it is a vital one. It requires a willingness to engage in open and honest dialogue, to listen to the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and to work together to find solutions that are fair and just for everyone. It is about building relationships, respecting cultures and celebrating diversity.

This bill has two main parts. It will establish the Treaty Institute and commence a Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry. The Treaty Institute will help develop and provide a framework to prepare and then commence treaty negotiations with the Queensland government whilst the inquiry will hear and chronicle both First Nations and non-First Nations stories. This inquiry will nominally run for three years, but the bill provides for that to be extended by the minister of the day, and this is in acknowledgement that where we are going is completely new territory. It has never been done before in Queensland. It is a shared journey between both First Nations and non-First Nations Queenslanders.

I want to acknowledge the vision, leadership and courage of our Premier in bringing this bill to the parliament and for bringing us to this point. It would have been easy to put this in the too-hard basket. Many leaders have done exactly that in the past. I also want to acknowledge my fellow First Nations parliamentarians—the members for Algeester and Cook. I want to acknowledge the incredible work and commitment of the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships. I want to acknowledge all of the members who have contributed to the Path to Treaty process here in Queensland over several years and I want to acknowledge the work of the committee in examining this bill and the incredible personal commitment of the committee chair, the member for Mansfield. I also want to acknowledge every single ally of First Nations people here in Queensland and right throughout the country who have been there in big ways and in small ways to help over the years to bring us to this moment, and that includes the work of the members of our local Bundamba reconciliation group. Most of all, I want to acknowledge the strength, resilience and grace of our elders and of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is a humbling moment for me personally to be able to stand here as a proud Queenslander, an Aboriginal Gubbi Gubbi man, a legislator, a policymaker, a representative of the Bundamba community and a member of the Palaszczuk government.

Should the federal Voice referendum pass, as I truly hope it does, later this year, then, coupled with this bill, Queensland will be uniquely placed to achieve voice, treaty and truth. Treaty is, by definition, consensus. It is agreement; it is respect. Treaty is a fair go. It is about acknowledging the past and working together to create a more just and equitable society for the future. Ultimately, treaty is about a better future for all Queenslanders. In the words of Yothu Yindi from its signature song *Treaty*—

Now two rivers run their course

Separated for so long

I'm dreaming of a brighter day

When the waters will be one

Treaty can turn that dream into reality. It can turn hope into belief. I commend the bill to the House.