




Speech By  
**Hon. Leanne Enoch**

**MEMBER FOR ALGESTER**

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### **PATH TO TREATY BILL**

 **Hon. LM ENOCH** (Algester—ALP) (Minister for Communities and Housing, Minister for Digital Economy and Minister for the Arts) (3.26 pm): Before I begin I acknowledge the Gimuy Walubara Yidinji people and the Yirrganydji and Djabugay people of this region. I also acknowledge all the First Nations peoples who are in the gallery witnessing this very important debate today. I also acknowledge my colleagues the member for Cook and the member for Bundamba. We are three First Nations people in this parliament who obviously have a great deal of commitment and attachment to this debate today.

I rise in support of the Path to Treaty Bill 2023 and, in doing so, contribute to what can only be described as a history-making moment in Queensland. Over the past 200-plus years, since first contact, there have been a number of legislative and policy themes specifically related to the first peoples of this country: the first wars brought about by the policies of eradication and annihilation during the invasion of this continent where Queensland was the location for multiple conflicts including recorded massacres right across this state; the segregation policies that saw First Nations peoples forcibly moved from their ancient homelands and corralled onto government run missions; the assimilation policies that oversaw a generation of children stolen from their families based on the colour of their skin; and the self-determination policies that sought to create the foundations of community control but failed to ensure a balanced and equal power base.

Colonisation and its multiple policy settings underpinned by an absence of treaty has left its mark on our state and on our identity. Today we set a legislative course to look deeply and honestly into the path that was laid out when terra nullius, this country's first lie, provided the foundation for the discarding of First Nations peoples who have lived in and cared for this place for thousands of generations. Today we set in legislation a new conversation regarding our story as a people not only through the honest conversations regarding the truth of our past but also through new, profound conversations about who we are today and who we want to be into the future.

This new legislative course will not always be comfortable or easy. There will be times when it will be hard to navigate, when the truth will be painful and shameful, when the truth will be opening up the very challenges that will be so complex that our resolve to take these steps will be tested. Importantly, there will be moments of great clarity and breakthrough when we will recognise our collective contribution to our identity as a people and moments of tremendous healing when our understanding of who we truly are is deepened as we forge a path forward of shared prosperity and understanding. This is fundamentally the basis of this bill.

I would like to acknowledge the work of the Community Support and Services Committee: the committee chair, the member for Mansfield, Corrine McMillan; and the committee members, including the member for Cook, Cynthia Lui, the first Torres Strait Islander person ever elected to any parliament in Australia; the member for Nicklin, Rob Skelton; the deputy chair, the member for Burnett; and the members for Oodgeroo and Maiwar. I also acknowledge Minister Crawford and his department for their leadership and dedication to this important work along with the former minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partnerships Jackie Trad, who committed government to this journey.

I especially want to recognise the courage and strength of the members of the Interim Truth and Treaty Body, the Treaty Advancement Committee, the Treaty Working Group and the Eminent Panel who, over many years, carried so gently and respectfully the stories, views, experiences, hopes and aspirations of those who have gone before us. Some dedicated their entire lives to the notion of treaty; many of them are no longer with us. This bill is a tribute to those who have brought us this far, and it is also a commitment to those who are yet to come.

The Path to Treaty Bill will establish a First Nations Treaty Institute to develop a framework for treaty negotiations and to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to prepare for those negotiations. The bill also sets in train a Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry to examine the impacts of colonisation and to facilitate healing.

The committee's report includes 18 recommendations. The recommendations related to truth-telling in particular are of great significance at this point on our path to treaty. Recommendation 12 suggests that the terms of reference for the Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry should explicitly recognise the relationship between truth-telling and treaty. This is critical. The path to treaty can only be forged when the truth of our sometimes ugly and uncomfortable and confronting past is understood and acknowledged. Simply put, the relationship between truth-telling and treaty is indivisible and it should be acknowledged in the inquiry's terms of reference.

Recommendation 14 seeks to ensure that evidence obtained during the Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry is managed appropriately. In undertaking this inquiry we are asking First Nations people to come forward, some for the first time, and share personal accounts that may have been held within families for generations, or it may be a first-person account of their own lived experiences. When a person offers to share a significant part of their story, it is incumbent upon us to receive that story with respect and in a culturally and emotionally aware way. Indeed, if the inquiry is to achieve its goal, we must ensure it is a safe space for First Nations people to speak the truth.

How we then hold the truths that are shared and retell them when permission has been given is also important to the treaty process. Within my portfolio, this is an issue I have given significant consideration to as I have responsibility for the Queensland State Archives. As the custodian of nearly 200 years of Queensland government records, the Archives has an important role to play in supporting Path to Treaty. Records held in the State Archives tell the story of the colonisation of Queensland, the impacts of which still affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the community more broadly today.

In June 2021, after releasing a statement of intent, the State Archives developed the First Nations First program to begin the journey to welcome, include and involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the gathering, managing and keeping of Queensland's state records. The First Wars project has involved researching and sharing archival evidence of frontier conflict for the first time. The project identified, digitised and assessed over 4,000 records relating to frontier violence in the 19th and 20th centuries with a focus on the state sanctioned native police. Importantly, last year over 11,000 archival items relating to First Nations peoples were digitised. This work will help First Nations peoples to tell their stories during the Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry. Opening up our state's archives is critical. It will allow Queenslanders to see firsthand the records of events written, in many instances by the very individuals responsible for the sad and often unimaginable acts of our past.

Right now in Australia we have not one but two opportunities to deliver a better future for generations to come. Later this year a referendum will be held regarding the recognition of First Nations peoples in the Constitution through a Voice to Parliament. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have strived for over a century to be recognised as the first peoples of this land. This year we can place that recognition in the Constitution through a permanent Voice to Parliament. This year Queenslanders have the opportunity to say 'yes'—yes to voice, yes to treaty, yes to truth. This bill marks a significant step in Queensland's path to treaty. Through this legislation we will speak the truth about our shared past and begin a new conversation. I wholeheartedly commend this bill to the House.