




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR LOGAN

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PATH TO TREATY BILL

 **Mr POWER** (Logan—ALP) (2.30 pm): I want to mark this special sitting in Cairns by recognising the traditional people of this region, the history of the steps taken towards recognition and agreement that happened, perhaps in a faltering way, in Cairns and Cooktown of which the member for Barron River and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships spoke in this place and the powerful presence of the broken tipped spear that lays upon our table. I rise to support the Path to Treaty Bill. It is right and just and proper that we fulfil the unfinished business of the creation of our state to reach a lasting recognition and agreement with the many first peoples of our state, from the people of Saibai to the descendants of the Yugambeh speaking peoples in Logan and the Gold Coast.

At a multicultural event in Logan I spoke of Australia. I tried to sum it up as a great engine of equality, a place people from all over the world come to, often in desperate and damaged circumstances, to make a success of their lives. England sent us what they thought were their worst: first criminals and political dissidents and then the poor uneducated of industrial society and Highland clearances, then the angry and damaged survivors of the great Irish hunger, the Great Famine, who watched a million die of starvation. After World War II we took those who were pushed out of Europe, displaced, abandoned and traumatised by war, whether from Sicily, Poland or elsewhere. Afterwards we continued this tradition to take Vietnamese and other refugees. So many found success in Australia, even if it took a generation or two to thrive. As I said, Australia is a great engine of success, equality and a fresh start.

My life and life in Logan is much richer and deeper for the living presence and heritage of Aboriginal Australians from all over our country. I visit the ceremonial ring in Tamborine and the caves in Yarrabilba. For me to hear children singing the anthem so beautifully in Yugambeh language is to be reminded that Australia would not be Australia without the descendants and living culture of our original inhabitants. That is why it is a really tough and confronting thing to recognise that this country has not extended success in the same way to the first peoples of our nation. It is a failure of our nation that we cannot extend success to all. I note the talking points from the other side: they were told to say we have not closed the gap, and indeed we have not. We have not extended that success of Australia to all. Some still ask why, but it is clear to me—and Paul Keating expressed it best when he said—

We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life.

We brought the diseases. The alcohol.

We committed the murders.

We took the children from their mothers.

We practised discrimination and exclusion.

It was our ignorance and our prejudice.

And our failure to imagine these things being done to us.

Many Australians who came from overseas came from trauma and dispossession, perhaps not as profound as Aboriginal trauma or dispossession, but it was significant. Australia represented a fresh start, a way to put behind the old and start anew. First Australians do not get to have this fresh start.

Instead, the very act of living in this place is a reminder of dispossession and the opening of old wounds. The very language we speak is a reminder for me that they are no longer connected to the language that their ancestors spoke because of this trauma and dispossession.

This process, which I wholeheartedly support, is there to make that fresh start on a new journey, to recognise the detail and the truth of dispossession and violence. For too long Australia has suffered from a collective amnesia about this violence, oppression and control. It is right and proper that we recognise this history. It will not be easy to hear for many Australians, but they should recognise there is a lasting pain for a person to know that the Australian nation refuses to admit the painful history of their family, their land and their language. It is only through telling the whole truth that we move forward towards treaty. This is the unfinished business of our nation: to recognise that many nations exist in this country.

We all know that the first English person who was directed by a government to come to this place, Captain Cook, was directed to first seek consent before any British possession. We know that this somewhat naive order was never fulfilled and it remains unfulfilled. Our treaties will take many forms and none of them will resemble the imagined 18th and 19th century British colonial treaties, but we do know that they will fulfil the destiny of our country. We do not know yet their form because rightly this is a process of discovery and understanding. They will not be the same in each area because they will be led by local people empowered through the process.

We stand noting that all Australians have a shared future on this continent. We have a shared destiny. As we work together towards a shared truth, we should also work together to share the making of treaties and fulfil that first notion of what we were supposed to do as a nation. I commend the bill to the House.