




Speech By  
**Hon. Mark Bailey**

**MEMBER FOR MILLER**

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### **PATH TO TREATY BILL**

 **Hon. MC BAILEY** (Miller—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (10.35 am): I acknowledge that we gather for the debate on this historic treaty bill on the traditional lands of the Gimuy Walubara Yidinji people. I offer my respects to their traditional owners past, present and emerging and I thank them for their custodianship of this extraordinary place over 60,000 years. I acknowledge too the many other First Nations peoples of the Far North Queensland region, including all the way up to Cape York and Torres Strait and in the gulf region.

I also acknowledge the Palaszczuk government's trailblazing three First Nations members of parliament, the Minister for Communities and Housing, Minister for Digital Economy and Minister for the Arts and the members for Cook and Bundamba. What a profound difference they have already made to advance justice for First Nations people in Queensland. I am proud to serve with them as colleagues and friends. They have been key to the bill that is before us. I also acknowledge the leadership of both the Premier and, of course, the minister in the process for this historic bill.

Yesterday, outside this temporary chamber at the welcome to country, traditional owners greeted us all in First Nations languages. It was a reminder, in terms of history, that what we know as Australia and Queensland are a relatively recent phenomena but that this is an ancient land. It is the oldest land and is inhabited by one of the oldest cultures in the world and we are still learning about its depth and breadth.

Let me be clear to members in this place: today I speak in this debate from my heart and not with my finger. I speak with a sense of reaching out to engage with members and our communities with goodwill and a desire to share what I know and understand because this bill goes far beyond any party politics of this time. It is a profound opportunity for the people of our state to evolve our connections across our different cultures, to broaden our understanding of the state's actual history, devoid of sugar-coating and revisionism, and for us all to grow who we are—not just the First Nations people of our state, although that is very important, but in fact all Queenslanders, whatever our background.

The fact is that from 1788 onwards there was a vast chasm in terms of understanding between European culture and the First Nations cultures of this continent that resulted in shocking and catastrophic outcomes, to say the least, for First Nations peoples, who had a sophisticated relationship with this land and a complex network across an often dry and harsh land that evolved over 3,000 generations. Over a century and a half of frontier expansion and consolidation, those shocking outcomes, by their nature, were mostly witnessed by only a few, but the reverberations from that pain cross time through intergenerational trauma that we still experience and grapple with today.

In the most part, First Nations peoples—and, I might say, some European people on the frontier at that time who were also victims of violence—have family and relatives whose experiences were spoken about or were not able to be spoken about but that passed, through trauma-driven behaviour or words, from generation to generation. Now, our generation can choose to ignore that colossal and often hidden part of our history or we can be courageous, stand up and open our hearts to the truth.

We can and must do better than previous generations and this bill shows that we are. I sincerely thank all members from all sides who have come to this debate with their hearts open and their verbal weaponry sheathed to grapple with something that no previous parliament in this state has done successfully.

In my teaching degree my historical inquiry was, in fact, on the Queensland parliamentary building, which is an extraordinary piece of architecture and has great presence. In my research on the debates of this House, I discovered that in the early 1860s one of the first debates was about the killing of native peoples on the frontier. Some members opposed that and some members defended it. That is a matter of historical fact and is on the *Hansard* of this House. Of course, First Nations peoples have endured much more violence, geographic dispossession and movement onto reserves and the systematic removal of children from families, which continued for a long period. In fact, the last child was systematically removed in 1970, after the referendum in 1967. It is never too late to heal the wounds of the past. We are one of the few Commonwealth nations that does not have a treaty between the state and its First Nations people. This is not a rushed bill. The treaty process commenced in 2019 and has been inclusive and steady to ensure its integrity.

An important and fundamental part of this bill is truth-telling about our full history. As a culture, we revere the past and its importance for our future. Only two weeks ago we all stopped at dawn to remember. 'Lest we forget' is enshrined on our monuments in cities and towns across our state and our nation as we open up our hearts to those who have defended this land every year. It is a small yet large step for us to take that part of our collective psyche and apply it to the First Nations peoples who suddenly were dealing with a foreign people on their land that they knew so intimately, who did their best to understand what was happening, who sought to defend their families, their women, their children and their ways.

This state and nation saw more than a century of frontier wars, armed Europeans taking land that was not theirs at the time and under arms. Due to the lie of our nation—often relatively flat and dry ground, being an ancient continent—the spread of Europeans was slow, so many battles and conflicts were not at all like the European battles that we are very familiar with, of large numbers of soldiers, armaments in set pieces. They were often smaller skirmishes of smaller parties on both sides as the frontier slowly grew. It is a simple fact that rifles and pistols were always going to defeat the spears of the time. Of course there were massacres. That is a documented fact and that is the truth. Lest we forget.

Treaty and truth-telling is applying those same standards that we extol every year to our First Nations peoples and their history. On Anzac Day we do not speak of guilt; we open our hearts. This is what we are doing with treaty. As I stand here, to my right is the parliamentary mace, a symbol of our democracy in session. Parallel to that is a spear of the Guugu Yimithirr peoples of the Cooktown region placed by the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships yesterday—a fitting foreground and witness for this debate and bill.

We must have our First Nations history, culture and inclusion better understood and respected by our broader culture while acknowledging its uniqueness. I not only commend the bill to the House but I also urge sincerely all members to consider voting affirmatively for this historic bill. In future years this bill will be examined and it will be considered like no other bill. Now is the time to commit so that all of us as members can say that we were a part of this affirmatively and that we were a part of this historic change and this historic process that goes beyond this parliament.