




Speech By
Hon. Mark Furner

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

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PATH TO TREATY BILL

 **Hon. ML FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities) (11.05 am): I rise today to support this bill. I am so humbled to be part of this government and part of this parliament in making a contribution here today. In doing so, I recognise the Indigenous people of the lands on which we gather and the elders past, present and emerging. I want to recognise my cabinet colleague Minister Enoch, I want to recognise you, Deputy Speaker Lui, member for Cook, and I want to recognise the member for Bundamba for not only their insight but their contributions, their beliefs and their courage in how they contribute to this government and this parliament on a regular basis.

I would like to thank the Premier for introducing this bill. It is one of the most important things we will do as a Queensland parliament. I also want to thank the Community Support and Services Committee and their chair, the member for Mansfield, for their detailed inquiry across the state and the recommendation that this bill be passed. The objectives of the bill are to establish a First Nations Treaty Institute to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to develop and provide a framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to prepare for and then commence treaty negotiations with the Queensland government and a Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry to inquire into, and report on, the effects of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

I also associate my contribution to the debate on this extremely important Path to Treaty Bill with three First Nations people I love and respect—Aunty Honor Cleary, deceased, her sister Aunty Lesley Williams and Lesley's daughter, Tammy Williams, who is in the chamber here this morning. Whilst having the fortune to travel and engage with our Indigenous peoples in Australia and Queensland as a former senator, a former minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partnerships and an MP, I am still humbled by constantly learning from the oldest surviving culture on our planet. My learnings originate from committee inquiries in both federal and Queensland parliaments and from having a genuine and profound interest in our First Nations people. In addition, there are many books and papers I have read, along with many amazing Indigenous people I have met in their communities. I have also been the ministerial champion for Mapoon community. It is such a privilege and honour to be in that position, along with my other ministerial colleagues who are responsible for the various discrete Indigenous communities across our state. In addition, I was privileged to be in the federal parliament during the Rudd government where we accepted that the right thing to do was to apologise to our First Nations people. On National Sorry Day this year at Teralba Park I will be reading the apologies to our Indigenous people who gather on that day, as should be the case, in recognising that we took the apology as part of our recognition of the sins of our past.

I wish to reflect upon my journeys with Aunty Honor Cleary to Cherbourg on a regular basis. Also, I draw upon an excellent book called *Not Just Black and White*, which was co-authored by Aunty Lesley and Tammy. On the three-hour trip to Cherbourg, Aunty Honor would explain the struggles she had growing up in Cherbourg, a town under the control of the then Queensland government. Without

hesitation, she introduced me to many of her family and provided an opportunity to explore the ration shed at Cherbourg. The ration shed stands as an incredible reflection of a dark past and a tribute to all those involved in its history and the ongoing maintenance of that building.

While it stands as a reminder for some of the amazing sports and community achievements those Indigenous persons achieved, it also stands as a truthful reminder of the dark past of those whose lives were controlled by the Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1887. Some politicians in the proposal of that act argued that placing the Aboriginal population on reserves would keep the white race pure. What an insidious, racist view to take in respect of that past. Punishment for the offence of answering back to a white official under that act ranged from being locked up in jail for a week on bread and jam and black tea or being sent to Palm Island.

Not long after turning 16, Lesley Williams was informed of her next journey in life. She was to be sent to a station in Condamine as a domestic servant. Following this posting she was sent to Taroom, where she worked from 4 am to 10 pm, cooking and doing domestic chores. It is hard to imagine what Indigenous people went through when we consider our own lives and contemporary standards we enjoy. However, Lesley's struggles were not over. She is best known for her fight to instigate domestic and international justice for Aboriginal workers, a campaign that resulted in an historical reparation package of \$55 million to all Indigenous workers who had their wages and savings controlled by past governments in Queensland.

It is beyond comprehension how anyone can be treated in this manner. No doubt the path to truth-telling will bring about many stories like those Aunty Honor and Aunty Lesley have explained, but they must be told and we must listen. With the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games less than a decade upon us, we need to demonstrate everything within our capacity to show to our nation and the world that Queensland is mature and respectful in recognising our First Nations people in supporting this extremely important bill and voting yes in the amendment to the Constitution later this year.

In the words of Aunty Lesley, 'It wasn't the money I wanted but to be treated with dignity and respect.' Now it is our time as legislators to address the wrongs of past legislation and pass new legislation which treats all Indigenous people with the dignity and respect they deserve. We all owe it to our First Nations people. I commend the bill to the House.