



Speech By
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Record of Proceedings, 9 May 2023

PATH TO TREATY BILL



Dr ROBINSON (Oodgeroo—LNP) (3.35 pm): I rise today to contribute to the debate of the Path to Treaty Bill 2023. I start by acknowledging that a lot of work has been done by many people over the last few years and, in effect, decades before—including interim committees and even more recently our parliamentary committee—across the state in the form of conversations, meetings, briefings and hearings and other ways of connecting and listening to what local Indigenous and other Queenslanders feel about our relationships going forward.

Up-front, I want to say that we all need to keep working together for a harmonised future for our children's and our grandchildren's sake. While much is still unresolved about our history, there is also reason for optimism about the future when you consider that each generation of Australians has a better understanding of the issues and challenges we face. In terms of the purpose of the bill, the explanatory notes state—

The Path to Treaty is a shared journey between the Queensland Government, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Queenslanders—a key reform with the ultimate goal of negotiating a treaty or treaties that will reframe and strengthen the relationship between Queensland's First Nations and the wider community.

They further state—

The Path to Treaty seeks a foundation for a better future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. A respectful relationship between the State and First Nations peoples. And from this foundation, benefit for all Queenslanders.

They go on to describe the bill as 'foundational legislation designed to drive Path to Treaty' and do so by establishing: 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. There are a whole range of other aspects and stated objectives that other speakers, the minister and shadow ministers have covered, so I will not repeat the reframing of those relationships.

There are several things that have informed my views over time in terms of my experience of Indigenous Australians, my appreciation of them and the situations they face. The first was my employment in the 1980s and early 1990s in Townsville in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. When working with students and parents, I saw the benefit of the mix of both cultural and western education to the students who were committed to homework programs or private tutorials in their home. Through that, many of these children went on to get good jobs, earn a good income, find dignity in work and give back to their own communities. My early experiences in education were that every dollar invested into Aboriginal education was very important and significant and achieved great outcomes.

The second was my connection with and work in community development—prior to politics again, and mostly in a Christian ministry context. I worked with pastors—some Aboriginal, some Islander, some Anglo and some from other cultures—in Christian ministry work in Queensland but also in visiting regions like Western Australia and the Kimberley to provide health services, youth work and Christian pastoral services, based on the gospel message of God’s love for all peoples and the call for Christian people to serve and love and care for all people. Over history, many elements of the church got that right in their provision of medical and health services, care and education. In other places and times they got it wrong and, as an arm of colonialism, sometimes got too close to the work of the governments of the day. In some cases it was state interference in the church, seeing churches almost as an arm of government.

The third area is my work with Indigenous peoples as a member of parliament for 14 years in the seat of Cleveland, now the seat of Oodgeroo, with the Goenpul, Ngugi and Noonuccal in the Redlands Coast Quandamooka area, particularly my experience with leading elders like Aunty Margaret Iselin and her husband, Pat, and their family and Aunty Joan Hendriks and other leaders and Quandamooka elders. I want to respectfully note that very sadly in recent years Aunty Margaret, Pat and Aunty Joan have passed away. I pay my respects.

My experience as the local MP working alongside traditional owners for 14 years has been a rewarding and very positive experience for me, helping me to understand Indigenous culture and its strengths. However, less positive has been witnessing—and the government may not want to hear this—the failure of two Labor governments, the Bligh and Palaszczuk governments, to honour their promises and deliver tangible benefits to Indigenous people that actually close the gap of disadvantage. For example, this government has promised for eight years to build Aboriginal housing on North Stradbroke Island. The government has not been able to confirm whether it has built any houses at all. Indigenous leaders say that the number built is zero. The government does not want to answer this question and be accountable for the things it says and the commitments it makes. That is its history—and for 30 years, mostly, we have had Labor state governments. It has managed to spend on North Stradbroke Island approximately \$40 million to build no new houses. Then the government says that the Indigenous land use agreement will deliver further land to build on, but the Quandamooka leaders say that some of the land set aside for building on is unsuitable. One parcel of land as part of the ILUA is actually a swamp that has been set aside potentially for Aboriginal housing. They are understandably feeling very ripped off by that.

Now, as we consider what a treaty or multiple treaties may mean, Labor wants Queenslanders to trust it and ignore its record of non-delivery as it once again promises the world to Indigenous people. It is these broken promises, not proving to be truthful and not being trustworthy, that has caused some elders on North Stradbroke Island, Minjerribah, to be wary very much even of the Path to Treaty. Some of them in that discussion have said that they were not part of consultation and they feel completely left out. I think the government has some serious repair work to do there.

They well know that since the early 1990s Labor has been in power for almost 30 years. They are tired of big-promising Labor governments that have had 30 years to form treaties or other forms of agreement yet have not done so, and they are wary of this new round of promises—sadly.

The fourth area is my experience of the native title claim on North Stradbroke Island, Minjerribah—the good and the other, with the secretive Indigenous land use agreement that caused upset amongst many of the traditional owners who were not consulted and felt cut out of the process. In fact, many of them were offended and have said from time to time to me, ‘We were completely unaware that that was something in our own ILUA.’ I think that is a very unacceptable process. The secretive approach of the government under Jackie Trad caused further division between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and between Indigenous groups themselves. To this day, Quandamooka leaders claim there has been financial mismanagement and funds still not accounted for.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Kelly): Pause the clock. Member, I have provided some latitude to you because I believe you have been exploring alternative policy approaches, but I think you are now straying well away from the long title of the bill. I would ask you to come back to the substance of the long title of the bill.

Dr ROBINSON: As we look at the Path to Treaty Bill 2023, there are questions, concerns and risks about this path that have been expressed by Quandamooka leaders to me. I gave them a commitment that I would raise these issues in the House. In terms of the issues they have raised, I have talked about Labor’s track record as a risk and challenge. I also mention the issue of modelling off New Zealand. While there is much we can learn, we need to be careful. New Zealand has been on this track for some 50 years and it has done a lot of very good work.

Government members interjected.

Dr ROBINSON: It is 50 years since the legislation was introduced in the early 1970s, according to the federal minister in New Zealand. Concerns have also been raised around finance and around consultation. There is a lot of work that Indigenous leaders believe needs to happen for this pathway to be successful. I also mention the statement of reservation by the LNP.

(Time expired)