




Speech By  
**Hon. Meaghan Scanlon**

**MEMBER FOR GAVEN**

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Record of Proceedings, 10 May 2023

### **PATH TO TREATY BILL**

 **Hon. MAJ SCANLON** (Gaven—ALP) (Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef and Minister for Science and Youth Affairs) (11.52 am): Before I begin, I want to acknowledge the fact that my feet are firmly on the grounds of the Gimuy Walubara Yidinji people. I also pay my deepest respects to their elders past, present and emerging as well as the traditional owners north, south and west that make up this beautiful part of the world and to the Kombumerri people of the land and sea country that I have the privilege of representing. I also want to acknowledge my colleagues the members for Algester and Bundamba and you, Madam Deputy Speaker Lui, the member for Cook, whose experiences and knowledge we all have the privilege of learning from but whose journey to get to this place was no doubt more difficult than my own.

I am very proud to be a member of a Labor government speaking on this bill—a bill that, if passed, will mean the treaty process is enshrined in law. I am, however, not proud of some of the laws and policies of successive parliaments and governments, including Labor governments, that inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on First Nations people. There have been many honest and powerful speeches so far in this debate about our respective backgrounds and knowledge. I said in my first speech that one of my earlier memories of becoming interested in politics was in primary school where I learnt about our country's cruel treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people—a history of invasion, dispossession, massacres and stolen wages. I can distinctly recall watching *Rabbit-Proof Fence* and as a 12-year-old feeling a profound sense of shame of the assimilation policy this country oversaw that stole a generation of children from their families based on the colour of their skin.

It is convenient and easy for some to suggest that these were things that happened a long time ago, but the reality is there are many people walking among us who carry the lived experience of these profound failures, and the intergenerational trauma of these policies continues to this day. There are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people alive today who, for a period of their life, were not allowed to vote in this country—something that was not changed until 1967—and there are in fact members of this place who were alive for that referendum. In the words of the former prime minister Paul Keating—

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.

That is why the Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry that examines the impacts of colonisation that this bill sets in train is so important. We as non-Indigenous Queenslanders need to open up our hearts and listen honestly. We need to come to this conversation acknowledging our biases and privileges. If we are ever going to fix the disadvantage First Nations people disproportionately experience from incarceration rates, worse health outcomes and the education gap, then we need to accept that these

metrics are a direct and enduring result of colonisation. Path to Treaty will be a path to closing those gaps. This bill responds to generations of calls from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Queensland for a formal agreement, for a treaty or treaties, which recognise First Nations peoples as the original custodians of the land, waters and air and provides a just and realistic foundation for a reframed relationship; an agreement that delivers broad and substantial outcomes for Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider Queensland community.

I want to acknowledge everyone who has been a part of advancing this reform, in particular to those elders who have passed away waiting for change. In preparing for this speech, I was reflecting on a meeting held on the Gold Coast with traditional owners back in 2019. At the time I said—

Yesterday was a day I will forever remember.

I had the privilege of listening to the view of people like Kombumerri elder Dr Graham Dillon about how we achieve Treaty.

The discussion was raw and emotional but ultimately, that's how it had to be for people's voices to be heard.

I believe a Queensland treaty will benefit us all by promoting reconciliation, healing, and a future that is more just, more equal and more respectful of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Four years later, and having had the privilege of meeting with traditional owners across this state, I remain even more optimistic about how profound this reform will be. I am very proud of the work the Department of Environment and Science is doing in rightfully returning lands, in jointly managing parks and in doubling our Indigenous Land and Sea Ranger program. Do we get everything right? Absolutely not, but we remain committed to making things better and taking up the generous offer made by people who have had every reason to have mistrust in government. It is incumbent on all of us to take up that offer, to listen to the call for voice, treaty and truth. As the Uluru statement concluded—

In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.

I commend the bill to the House.