




Speech By
Michael Healy

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

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PATH TO TREATY BILL

 **Mr HEALY** (Cairns—ALP) (6.06 pm): I rise in support of and to make my contribution to the Path to Treaty Bill. I also want to make it very clear that I support truth-telling and that I also strongly support the truth. I want to start today with a quote from an Australian whom I have admired for many years and has proven to be one of our great visionaries. He said—

Australia's treatment of her Aboriginal people will be the thing on which the world will judge Australia and Australians—not just now, but in the greater perspective of history.

When Gough Whitlam made that statement he knew there was a lot of work to be done in this important space. He knew of the journey which we as a nation needed to embark upon and the wrongs of the past that needed to be acknowledged and righted.

I want to touch on the member for Lytton's speech. For my sins I grew up in Sydney. This presents significant challenges around State of Origin time. My mother was from Erskineville. My father was from the south Sydney side of Darlington. There was an Aboriginal community living in Redfern that had been living there for thousands of generations before my Irish ancestors arrived. We learned at a very early age through interaction about the significant disparity, the racism and the great injustices. That was something that was taught to us very early, and it is something we have acknowledged and recognised.

I make that observation because I want to state for the record that it is a great privilege and I consider it to be a highlight of my parliamentary career to be part of a government that is doing the right thing. It is just the right thing to do. It is a journey. We have begun the journey. Hopefully, we will speed up as we get closer to it. This is a vitally important and very much needed process. The end benefits will far outweigh the process.

Treaty is the way for all Queenslanders to move forward and hold our heads high in the world arena. I know this will come with some resistance. I must say that, whilst I respect other people are entitled to their views, I am dumbfounded by those people who do not acknowledge the significant benefits that this journey and this part of the journey will provide. Their resistance, I am hoping, will dissipate in the face of decency, what is just and what is right—a Queensland brave enough to right the injustices of the past in our endeavour to unite and connect all Queenslanders and Australians in embracing First Nations history and culture as part of who we all are. This says so much about all of us. Path to Treaty will present challenges—and we have heard a number of speakers touch on those challenges—but we need to face those challenges. It will make us stronger, it will make us a greater community, it will connect us and it will give us great strength.

I think it is also important to acknowledge that what we propose here has already been embraced by many other nations. We heard the minister talk about some trips to New Zealand. Canada has 70 recognised treaties with First Nations Canadians. The United States has 364 recognised treaties. Norway, Sweden, Finland, Japan and Greenland have also signed and implemented treaties with First

Nations peoples. We now join these nations as a country that, in celebrating our First Nations people, will move forward with honesty, integrity, an accurate sense of our history and, more importantly, a greater understanding of our past.

I have always believed that until we recognise, acknowledge and fix the mistakes of our past we are doomed collectively to live with the burden of them. Our government is providing the people of Queensland with a new opportunity to celebrate what Queensland and Australia have meant to millions who have come here as convicts, immigrants, refugees and those seeking safety, opportunities and a quality of life where your children have a real future while acknowledging the rights of the world's oldest living culture to call this land ours and theirs. A treaty will unite us all in an equally shared recognition of our history and the future we all want to share. The truth-telling focus of our government's approach to treaty means that all Queenslanders participate in a process that promotes healing, justice and reconciliation as we seek to hear the voices of all Queenslanders on our road to that important recognition.

What a legacy we will leave for future Queenslanders, who can hold their heads high knowing we took the opportunity to unite all in the recognition of the ancient connection our First Nation community shares with us all through their understanding—this, their land and ours. All of our communities will benefit from sharing in First Nations culture, history and vision, and as I have said, we will be stronger as a community. We will leave behind a past that allowed many to build their lives on the shattered dreams of others.

The extraordinary Professor Tom Calma, Chancellor of the University of Canberra and Senior Australian of the Year 2023, said—

Here in Australia we are fortunate enough to have one of the richest and oldest continuing cultures in the world. This is something we should all be proud of and celebrate and embrace.

For me, it is the height of hypocrisy and pretence that we acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land and water on which we all live but we do not provide a legally acknowledged mechanism where those traditional custodians' voices might be heard.

I want to acknowledge the work of the committee and the member for Mansfield. I know she is very disappointed that she is not here because she, like many, made a great contribution. I want to acknowledge Minister Crawford—thank you very much, Minister, for the work that you do—the Premier and all of those who contributed to the committee, both in person and through written submissions. With treaty, we can and we should. I, like millions of other Queenslanders and Australians, are confident that we will.