




Speech By
Peter Russo
MEMBER FOR TOOHEY

Record of Proceedings, 10 May 2023

PATH TO TREATY BILL

 **Mr RUSSO** (Toohey—ALP) (11.12 am): I rise to speak in support of the Path to Treaty Bill 2023, and I am pleased to be able to do so from the home of the traditional custodians here in Cairns, the Gimuy Walubara Yidinji and Yirrganydji peoples on Gimuy country. I would also like to acknowledge my colleagues: the member for Algester, Leeanne Enoch; the member for Bundamba, Lance McCallum; and the member for Cook, Cynthia Lui, and thank them for their leadership on this wonderful issue. Last but not least, I thank Minister Crawford for his leadership on this historic legislation. As we all know, the bill was introduced into the Legislative Assembly by the Premier on 23 February 2023 and referred to the Community Support and Services Committee. I would also like to acknowledge the member for Mansfield, Corrine McMillan, who chaired that committee.

As has been stated by previous speakers, the object of the bill is 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 to establish a Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry to inquire into and report on the effects of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

This bill will ensure these main purposes are achieved with sufficient regard to Aboriginal traditional and island custom through: requiring the principles for administering the bill are complied with by ensuring that in partnership and good faith, the rights and history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are acknowledged and responded to in accordance with the Human Rights Act 2019 and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; requiring the Treaty Institute Council and members to have particular regard to the interests of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples; requiring the CEO to be appointed only if they are an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person and Treaty Institute Council members to be appointed having regard to the cultural diversity of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples; requiring Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry members to have at least one Aboriginal person and one Torres Strait Islander person and the majority of members are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders; requiring members of the Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry to have particular regard to the interests of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples; and requiring the inquiry to have regard to Aboriginal tradition or ailan kastom during truth-telling sessions.

The bill will also amend certain provisions in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities (Justice, Land and Other Matters) Act in response to a departmental review to align with the Path to Treaty objectives and repeal provisions that do not support the commitment to a reframed relationship.

The committee also made 12 aspirational recommendations that the committee considers vital to the successful establishment of a treaty framework and acceptance by the wider community, and for the treaties made between First Nations people and the Queensland government for the benefit of future generations. I am proud to be part of a government that does not shy away from a path to treaty, a matter that has been ignored for too long and considered by others as too hard.

Australia's history under white political authority has been, at best, deeply troubled. The First Nations people have never ceded sovereignty and have always asserted that their sovereignty continues to exist.

In 2022, the 50-year anniversary of continuous occupation by the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra was recognised. The Tent Embassy began its public life on 26 January 1972 and should also be thought of as the site of the longest protest for Indigenous land rights, sovereignty and self-determination in the world. Initially, the protesters were making a stand about land rights following the then prime minister William McMahon's speech that dismissed any hope for Aboriginal land rights and re-asserted the government's position on the policy of assimilation.

Path to Treaty is urgent work, one that acknowledges that developing a treaty or treaties needs to be built on a shared and reflective approach. I commend the bill to the House.