




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT

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PATH TO TREATY BILL

 **Mr MOLHOEK** (Southport—LNP) (6.13 pm): I rise to make a very brief contribution in support of the bill before the House: the Path to Treaty Bill 2023. At the risk of being accused of plagiarism, I thought I would open with a summary of our history from some law notes from Griffith University I dug out earlier this week. I agree with the words of the commentator when they said—

It is important to acknowledge the past—the history of this country that begins tens of thousands of years ago and was interrupted by the invasion of this land by the British. As we have discussed, the colonisation of Australia was predicated on an idea of settlement. That suggests a peaceful, gentle process, but as we know it was anything but. We know of frontier wars and resistance to British occupation, but in legal terms adopting the misnomer of settlement ruled out recognition of native title, of customary or traditional ownership of the land by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for over two centuries. This approach was underpinned by the doctrine of terra nullius: the assumption that this land belonged to no-one. This approach was catastrophic for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and a legacy which persists.

Fast-forward a few years to the 1970s. A period of significant social and political protest and reform led to jurisdictions adopting land rights legislation in favour of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. However, this legislation did not address the myth of terra nullius and did not recognise native title. The High Court finally jettisoned the doctrine of terra nullius in the 1992 Mabo decision.

It has been an interesting journey from high school student at Keebra Park on the Gold Coast to a member of parliament. I have spent many years in the broadcast industry and I too have ridden societal waves of change at different times towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. I have said it recently in the media and I will say it again: there is not much that we can be proud of.

At the Parliamentary Friends of First Nations debate recently at the Queensland parliament I reflected on two items I have hanging in my office that serve as a reminder of our history. One is a poster from the 1967 referendum calling on Australians to support the right of Indigenous Australians to vote. That poster says simply 'vote yes.' The other is a piece of art I acquired when I was assistant minister for child safety. It is a painting of a young Indigenous child that hangs in my office. I keep it there to remind myself firstly of the over-representation of Indigenous children in the child protection system but also because it provides a sense of hope. This particular painting depicts a young Indigenous child with the most beautiful eyes. They are eyes full of hope. As we stand here in this chamber today and debate this legislation, my hope—and I am sure the hope of all of us in the House—is that the outcome of this path to treaty will result in significant reforms for Indigenous Australians, Indigenous Queenslanders. I am sure all of us share the hope that we will see a significant closing of the gap.

Over the last decade it has been my great privilege as a member of parliament to travel around the state and visit a number of Indigenous communities. I have spent time at Palm Island, Napranum, Kowanyama and Cherbourg. I have been to Yarrabah a couple of times. While there are still many great challenges, I am heartened to see there is a transition and there are improvements. The name of the mayor of Yarrabah escapes me, but when we met with that council—

Ms Leahy: Ross Andrews.

Mr MOLHOEK: I will take that interjection from the member for Warrego—Ross Andrews. When we met with the mayor of Yarrabah as part of our health inquiry last year we were taken to visit the health facilities in that community. It was encouraging to see the progression that has been achieved over the last 10 years. There were people there who were invigorated, enthusiastic, smiling and full of passion. The spirit of what we have seen in that community and more recent developments there are the sort of progress we want to see in Indigenous communities across the state of Queensland.

I know this will be no secret to you, but in a publication from Create Foundation—an organisation with very humble beginnings that was established in 1999 to track and support the progress of young people—their strategic plan talks about some 45,000 children and young people who are in care; that is, children who are not living in their own homes and whose families do not directly control their futures. Sadly, today still around 40 per cent of those children are First Nations children. That just simply says to me there is so much more to be done.

While the objectives of this bill are to establish an institute to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to develop and provide a framework for treaty negotiations, my hope is that there will be far more that comes out of this process and that in truth-telling we will have the hard discussions around how we can improve the lot of Indigenous children in this state and in this nation and how we can provide greater hope for Indigenous young people.

I have mentioned on many occasions in public forums that I am proud of the fact that Griffith University—which is predominantly based in my electorate of Southport, although I share the overlap with the electorate of Bonney—now has some 2,500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students studying across its three campuses. That is actually the largest cohort of Indigenous students in the state. I look forward to the day when many of those students graduate and return to their communities and take on the role of doctors and frontline service workers there so we see far greater cultural appropriateness and practices in those communities and Indigenous people actually working more closely with their own to improve and progress the challenges that many Indigenous communities face.

We have to recognise our past and acknowledge that. We also have to reconcile our past. My sincere hope is that, if this legislation is passed this week, we will see a significant closing of the gap, that we will see dialogue and discussion around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues and challenges in our state, that we will see truth-telling and open and honest dialogue and, more importantly, that we will see real action that improves the lives of Indigenous young people and Indigenous communities across this state.