



Speech By
Robert Skelton

MEMBER FOR NICKLIN

Record of Proceedings, 9 May 2023

PATH TO TREATY BILL

 **Mr SKELTON** (Nicklin—ALP) (12.44 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Path to Treaty Bill 2023. I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we gather as well as First Nations people from other country who are here. I pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. I also want to acknowledge the warm welcome we received from the traditional owners and others from the surrounds of Cairns this morning, and I thank them for that.

The purpose of the bill is to establish the First Nations Treaty Institute to prepare a framework for treaty negotiations with Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples and to support Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples to participate in treaty negotiations, to provide for the establishment of a Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry about the continuing impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and to amend the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities (Justice, Land and Other Matters) Act 1984 and the Fire and Emergency Services Act 1990 for particular purposes.

I firstly want to thank all of the people who submitted and, more importantly, the people who came to the hearings and spoke their truth and stories during the process. It was obvious to me how difficult this was for many of the submitters. I want to thank the Interim Truth and Treaty Body for its assistance and guidance; the parliamentary staff and Hansard which, as already covered by my good friend the member for Burnett, operated with some degree of difficulty in the areas that we covered; my committee colleagues for all supporting each other in a very emotionally challenging environment on a very important piece of legislation; my good friend the chair, the member for Mansfield, who cannot be with us but has invested so much hard work in drafting the report; and, finally, I want to acknowledge my good friend the member for Cook, who at every hearing had to reconcile with her own history. Cynthia, you are a giant of a person and I am so grateful to know you, as you always inspire me.

I think everyone understands the significance of being on this path. I have thought long and hard as to how I could add any more gravitas in speaking to it. I have certainly learnt more about the history of our state in the last few months than at any other time in the past. I am very fortunate and felt that I indeed lived in a lucky country. It is why my life has taken a path of service, as I have always been a believer in our community. I long suspected that there were some serious gaps in my knowledge in relation to our shared history and I have tried to read more to gain an understanding. I now realise that First Nations people have not been so lucky in our lucky country and I could have never guessed at their experiences.

I was going to relay to the House some of what I heard during the hearings, just to add context to the path we have undertaken, but I think that is not my place and I have it already in my memory. It is up to all of us to share our histories and listen to each other. I cannot hope to replicate or do justice to the many people who spoke. In my heart I hope that it is a weight off their back and that they continue to speak up. I hope everyone does this with respect in the coming years of inquiry.

From the moment that the Premier handed down this bill I realised how important it was to us as a state and as a nation. For too many years we have got things wrong and not listened. This is our chance to make change: change for good; change that is fair and just; importantly, change that First Nations people get to determine for themselves. I encourage all Queenslanders to participate without fear or prejudice. There are many speakers to come who have much to contribute to this debate. I look forward to hearing from our First Nations members, the member for Algeester and the member for Bundamba, who are to follow me. I also want to thank them for giving advice as we interrogated the bill.

In closing, I thank the Premier and her department for introducing this bill and the member for Barron River and his department for all their efforts in helping us logistically in relation to this bill. Even though this is long overdue, it will probably be my greatest privilege and honour in this House. I commend this bill to the House.