




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR NOOSA

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PATH TO TREATY BILL

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (3.54 pm): I want to acknowledge the traditional custodians of Queensland, its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging and also special gratitude to all for the beautiful welcome to country this morning. This bill is another step into our future. It is about providing for the making of a treaty or treaties with our First Australians by setting up a process in which to negotiate with our original custodians. The first step was the establishment in 2019, as we have heard, of an Eminent Panel of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders and non-Indigenous Queenslanders as well as a Treaty Working Group. These groups made recommendations on the Path to Treaty, truth-telling, healing and capacity building.

When I first heard of this Path to Treaty, I asked what it would do and achieve. This bill provides part of the answer, firstly by establishing a First Nations Treaty Institute to provide a legal framework for First Australians to prepare for and commence treaty negotiations with the Queensland government. The committee has recommended that the government reconsider the use of the word 'institute'. It may appear innocuous. However, from an Indigenous perspective, as we have heard, that represents the institutionalisation that they have been subjected to. The bill also establishes a Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry appointed by the government with a majority of First Australians. The inquiry will examine and document the individual and societal effects of colonisation, promote community awareness and understandings of these impacts, and make recommendations to government. Importantly though, this inquiry must provide an avenue for all Indigenous Australians to have input, especially those in remote locations who have vastly different experiences of colonisation and its impacts than those maybe in the more built-up areas.

Overwhelmingly submitters supported the bill in principle—from the Queensland Local Government Association to the Queensland Art Gallery and the Queensland University of Technology. Out of 35 submissions, there was only one opposing which believed that it might be divisive as it will treat Indigenous people differently. The committee made 18 recommendations, with a couple in response to submissions which questioned the timing for the completion of the Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry. For example, the Queensland Law Society did not consider three years sufficient given the complexity and depth of consideration required, with the committee recommending an increase to five years. I note the lack of appropriate consultation—we have brought this up a number of times from committees—as relayed by the member for Maiwar. Two months is just not enough time.

Other recommendations highlighted the need for education on the difference between the Path to Treaty, the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the Voice to Parliament, as submitters suggested that there was confusion about these separate but related processes, and from my own experience in my community there definitely is. Another recommendation is for the Queensland school curriculum to reflect the shared history of the state of Queensland, and this is vital. In Noosa we have learned about the complexity of Indigenous groups, beliefs and traditions versus western lore. This diversity was recognised by the Cairns Regional Council in its submission where it stated that there are over 50 First Nations language groups across Queensland, with the Cairns region being home to the largest number

of individual traditional custodial groups, each with their own unique laws, traditions, languages, culture and traditional knowledge. This can be confusing for non-Indigenous Queenslanders, leading to many questions from our communities that often as MPs we have not been able to answer, hence why we need mechanisms to understand this diversity, with the committee recommending that the decentralised and expansive geography of Queensland be recognised and that the Treaty Institute be organised accordingly to develop approaches to manage this diversity to prevent fracturing as well as misunderstandings.

Another recommendation was around ensuring appropriate engagement with non-Indigenous Queenslanders throughout this process. This is essential. As one non-Indigenous health worker with 10 years experience in Indigenous communities said in a submission—

There are three sides to this treaty process—the state, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous Queenslanders. For this to be successful we all have to be informed and engaged with this process. It also is part of a bigger picture and a long-term path.

The committee did recommend that the government conduct a broad public awareness and information campaign. However, it needs to go much further. We need to actually listen and move beyond the tick and flick by not talking at Queenslanders. We need to talk with them and accept that opposing views are essential for a well-functioning society. Most importantly, the labelling needs to stop. Not agreeing to a majority viewpoint should not lead to those in a minority being labelled as anti 'somethings' as it creates fear and intimidation. Truth-telling requires a safe space. Ultimately we are all Australians, and when any Australian suffers we all suffer. The wrongs inflicted upon our First Australians continue: unacceptable health impacts, incarceration rates and unemployment.

As Noel Pearson said recently in speaking about the Voice to Parliament, it is not about guilt or atonement; it is about recognition. Path to Treaty is another part of that recognition and provides Queensland with an avenue to listen, learn and deliver much better futures for all. That should not take away from other Queenslanders who have had many wrongs inflicted in their histories as well through wars, poverty and crimes which continue today. There is much hurt, and these shared hurts are one essential component and connector in the healing.

As we embark on this journey in our own small way in Noosa, as in many other communities, we have experienced the complexities around processes such as native title claims and Indigenous land use agreements. As I have raised during previous committee inquiries and in relation to the Cooloolo Great Walk, the confidential nature of these negotiations leave room for conjecture leading to misinformation and mistrust. It is important that treaty negotiations be transparent as part of reducing conflict and ensuring this is a path we all travel together. It is also essential that there is an avenue provided for conflict resolution between First Nations groups, not only now—and we do need it now—but also heading down this path.

There are further lessons we have learned from our own Noosa experiences: the need to invest the time and resources to ensure any process brings Indigenous groups together with the information they need to make important decisions. This includes access to meetings, either physically or online. The second is to organise gatherings where Indigenous groups and non-Indigenous groups can ask questions and share knowledge openly and in a safe space. This bill is not just a piece of legislation; it starts a journey for all Indigenous Queenslanders, a journey for those of us who are non-Indigenous, a journey that should never discriminate where we were born. It should not be rushed nor feared. It does not take away our respective histories. It must be transparent, informative and expansive. Importantly, it needs to be undertaken with compassion, respect and shared vision with an understanding that along the journey not everyone will agree. Mistakenly, we often believe that our First Australians would unite in beliefs and efforts to reach a shared vision. However, as we have found, just like the rest of us, they often do not agree on the way to get there. This is okay. Again, differing viewpoints should be celebrated, as these differences are opportunities for greater understanding, knowledge and growth.

In closing, I thank the minister, departments, the committee members and chair and their secretariat for their efforts on this bill. This has been a big piece of work done under unacceptable tight time frames. Thank you to all Queenslanders who participated through submissions, hearings and forums. To all who have assisted in my own community—including some very diverse sides of Kabi Kabi or Gubbi Gubbi peoples—to help us develop greater understandings on the differences, I extend my deep appreciation. Even though it has been difficult, at times frustrating and confusing, we have learned much and know that in the coming months and years we will learn so much more. I commend this bill to the House.