




Speech By
Hon. Scott Stewart

MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

Record of Proceedings, 10 May 2023

PATH TO TREATY BILL

 **Hon. SJ STEWART** (Townsville—ALP) (Minister for Resources) (10.48 am): I first acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. What an amazing ceremony we had yesterday to welcome us all to this amazing part of the land. I, too, come from an amazing part of the land. I come from Wulgurukaba and Bindal country. Wulgurukaba people are the canoe people and for 65,000 years they paddled across to Yunbenun. Around 253 years ago, a white fella, or a micaloo in traditional language, sailed past. His compass went a little bit crazy and he went, 'Gee, that island must be magnetic,' so he called it Magnetic Island. These days we affectionately call it 'Maggie Island'. We still recognise the Wulgurukaba and the Bindal people for their custodianship for the last 65,000 years of the area that we call Cowboy's country or Townsville.

I rise to support the Path to Treaty Bill before us today. This bill signals to everyone that we are ready and willing to confront the past and work together on a better way forward. Truth-telling and listening are key as we embark on this landmark journey together. There are not many places in Queensland this applies to more than Palm Island, which has at times had a dark and troublesome history. Sadly, more than 100 years ago Palm Island became a place to which more than 40 different Indigenous groups were displaced and forcibly sent. For this reason, it is a unique community with a huge range of voices. As the local member, I know some of the struggles Palm Island has faced and continues to face. What I continuously hear is that community leaders on Palm Island want to work more collaboratively with governments. That was made clear to me during the committee's public hearing on Palm Island earlier this year. While we are doing that now, we can always do it better.

Path to Treaty will help make partnerships and relationships with Indigenous people right throughout Queensland more meaningful. Path to Treaty is part of the reconciliation process—like with this broken-tipped spear. I had to tell that story to a number of staff in my ministerial office who did not know the story of the encounter with James Cook and the food source—turtles and how important they were for traditional people—and the meaning of the breaking of the spear tip. Placing this here during this sitting is so powerful. It is very symbolic, but it certainly is a great way forward and I congratulate the minister for displaying its importance.

Path to Treaty is part of the reconciliation process, but it is also about hearing the truth and getting the true stories told. As Minister for Resources, I am proud to play a small role in Queensland's Path to Treaty through native title, transferring state land or using traditional languages in place names. We are committed to preserving First Nation cultures and values. We have wiped 15 racist placenames off Queensland maps as well as renaming cultural sites to embrace the language of our traditional owners. Some of those placenames are close by. One that we renamed just recently was a creek to the south of Cairns. After a lot of consultation with traditional owners we renamed it Bana Gindarja Creek. That is what they knew it as for 65,000 years and that is the name we have returned it back to.

Truth-telling is an essential part of Path to Treaty. It will be uncomfortable and it will not be easy, but it is important. It is relevant to rename placenames because the reality is that some of these places have horrific stories and connotations associated with them. If we do not acknowledge these truths with Indigenous people we will not be able to move forward. As a good friend of mine, the member for Thuringowa says, you must know where you come from to know where you are going. It is so true.

Since 2015 native title rights have been determined to exist over more than 210,900 square kilometres of Queensland. For the students who are joining us here today, that is roughly the size of Victoria. Native title is vital for Path to Treaty because it helps preserve Indigenous cultures, values and traditions. Since 2015 the Palaszczuk government has returned more than one million hectares of state owned land to traditional owners, and we are very proud of that. In Mach I had the pleasure of attending a stunning sacred site known as Minto Crag, or Whinpullin as the traditional owners call it, for the land transfer. I have to say that it was one of the most amazing days I have experienced. I am proud to say that traditional owners now hold Whinpullin as freehold. It is theirs to hold in trust forever.

Land transfers and native title are incredibly important as we continue on the path to treaty, but it is not just about the transfer of land; this is about recognising and respecting the unique cultures, practices and histories of our First Nations people. It is about acknowledging their enduring connection to country—a connection that has lasted more than 65,000 years. As we continue on the path to treaty we must remain committed to working in partnership with our First Nations people. We must listen to their stories, honour their traditions and work towards a more inclusive and just Queensland for all. By doing so we will not only create a brighter future for our First Nations people but for all Queenslanders. The students who are watching this parliament here today are part of this changing history. We are creating a future where we acknowledge and learn from our past while working towards a better tomorrow. By working together through Path to Treaty we will create a better Queensland for all. I commend the bill to the House.