




Speech By
Hon. Yvette D'Ath

MEMBER FOR REDCLIFFE

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PATH TO TREATY BILL

 **Hon. YM D'ATH** (Redcliffe—ALP) (Minister for Health and Ambulance Services) (6.22 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Path to Treaty Bill 2023. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have demonstrated resilience through their enduring culture, law and knowledge shared through generations of proud First Nations peoples. It is important that we acknowledge the profound impacts that colonisation has had on the quality of life of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The laws we have passed, the damage we have done and the generational trauma must be recognised and must be talked about.

The Path to Treaty reforms outlined in this bill will work towards treaty readiness—highlighting the importance of, firstly, embarking on a truth-telling and healing journey, preparing for negotiations and agreement making, and working towards cultural change within government at an agency level, which includes my agency of Health and Ambulance Services. Specifically, the bill will establish the First Nations Treaty Institute and a Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry as recommended by the Treaty Advancement Committee's report delivered in October 2021. This institute will play an important role in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to prepare for treaty negotiations. The 10-member statutory body will provide a foundation for a treaty-making framework with an aim to empower First Nations people to participate in the treaty-making process.

The bill will also establish a Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry, which I think is well and truly overdue. It will play a very important role in gaining an insight into the historical and ongoing impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Queensland and facilitate that truth-telling and healing for all Queenslanders. This will be implemented through the truth-telling sessions and/or hearings, with powers to require the chief executive officers of government entities to produce a document, make a submission or attend a hearing if the inquiry considers the CEO can assist with its functions. It is on all of us to ensure we do everything to encourage our First Nations people to participate in that process and tell their stories, whether they be in private or public, to have that voice heard. I want to commend the requirement that the inquiry consist of five members with the majority being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and be representative of gender diversity as well.

As the health minister, I want to acknowledge that this bill will also complement the ongoing work we have been undertaking as a government, such as our First Nations health equity reform agenda, which we should be very proud of as a government. A cornerstone of the reform agenda was the legislative amendments we passed back in 2020 and 2021 to require our hospital and health services to appoint at least one First Nations person to their governing boards and to co-design, co-develop and co-implement the First Nations health equity strategy. I am very proud of the fact that all of our 16 hospital and health services across Queensland have now published their inaugural health equity strategy and commenced their initial three-year implementation cycle.

I am proud that there are a number of health commitments and reforms which complement this bill and the Path to Treaty, including: our commitment of \$37.8 million over two years for 2021 to 2023 towards a number of initiatives, including five new First Nations maternity services across Queensland

and expanding the Birthing in our Community program; creating an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health division within the Department of Health to drive change; appointing the inaugural chief First Nations officer and deputy director-general in 2019; and appointing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health executives, system leaders, across the hospital and health services. This shows that we are not just talking but we are acting. We are embedding reforms to recognise that we need to not just close the gap on the health outcomes of our First Nations people but also embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our own workforce to look after their own mob and to do that on country. It is so important that we embrace that opportunity. It is important that these strategies are underpinned by action plans that are measured, accountable and transparent so that the whole community can see what we are doing. These strategies will continue to evolve over time and be co-designed with the community.

These commitments show that this bill is another step in the Palaszczuk government's long-term commitment to achieving health parity between our First Nations and non-Indigenous Queenslanders. It is completely unacceptable that our First Nations people, our young people, are suffering from conditions and dying from conditions that should not exist in a country like Australia and that we know are preventable. They are suffering at a much higher rate than the general population. We have failed our First Nations people for far too long, and we need to take this opportunity through this bill and through other initiatives across government and every agency to start turning the tide on what has occurred. We can only do that by starting to have the conversations around truth and looking at our past.

As many members have already heard, we will hear stories that are uncomfortable and confronting, and so we should. We cannot learn from our past if we do not identify the past and if we do not talk about what has never been spoken about. I want to acknowledge Minister Enoch and her very important role with State Archives and what we will discover. In every one of our communities we will discover something we did not know, and it will not be pretty and we need to acknowledge that. We need to come together with our First Nations people not just in our remote or regional communities but in every suburb and every community across Queensland. We need to sit with them and hear their stories, hear their pain, grieve with them for that pain and then talk about how we come together and move forward. I know from the health perspective that we will hear some uncomfortable truths.

There is still racism and discrimination out there against our First Nations people. There is still very much unconscious bias and racism. We know that it still exists across the health system as well. We need to be honest with ourselves that that exists. We need to use this opportunity to change that. This bill is a clear demonstration of the Palaszczuk government being fully committed to delivering on our promises to First Nations people in Queensland working collaboratively towards treaty. The importance of this legislation cannot be understated.

I want to note that I had the absolute honour of serving as a federal member of parliament when the then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd delivered the national apology. I consider it an honour and privilege to serve in the Queensland Labor government that prioritises and invests itself in the reconciliation process. In closing, I want to also note how proud I am as a Labor member who will be supporting the yes vote to give our First Nations people the voice they deserve in our Constitution later this year. Thank you.