

# **DR MARISA PATERSON MLA SPEECH**

**30 November 2021**

## **Legislative change for greater recognition of persons important in reconciliation**

**Start** *Nb – a 15-minute speech is around 1,650 – 1,950 words (this is 1,650)*

Thank you, Madame Speaker.

I wish to acknowledge and pay my respects to the past, present and future traditional custodians and elders of this land, the Ngunnawal people. I wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing cultural, spiritual and educational practices and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

I also wish to acknowledge my respect of deceased persons, as I will be mentioning the names of persons passed on.

I was saddened to hear the news this morning that, overnight, Aboriginal actor, David Dalaithngu, passed away from lung cancer. I was lucky to have met David a few times during my work in Arnhem Land.

We will all remember him for the roles he played in some of the most iconic films featuring Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culture – films including his beautiful narration of *Ten Canoes*, world famous films like *Crocodile Dundee*, *Rabbit Proof Fence*, *The Tracker*, *Walkabout* and the beautiful moving film, *Storm Boy*.

He opened the eyes of the world to strong, positive depictions of Aboriginal people, their culture and landscapes. And the glitz and glamor of movie stardom was in stark contrast to how I met him, once on the side of an Arnhmen Land road in a borken down truck, and once under a tarp in a remote outstation of the Ramingining community.

On this day that we pay tribute to such a contribution, I'm pleased to present to the Assembly the Public Place Names Amendment Act 2021.

The amendment I propose is small and simple, but important.

Under the *Public Place Names Act 1989* the Minister – Minister Gentleman – may determine the name of a public place that is Territory land. Public places include an avenue, road, street, geographical feature or place that the public is entitled to use, as well as any unleased land.

In making such determination the Minister must have regard to certain matters, among which include – at section 4(2)(a):

the names of persons famous in Australian exploration, navigation, pioneering, colonisation, administration, politics, education, science or letters.

My amendment to the Bill is simply, but meaningfully, omitting the word ‘colonisation’ and substituting with ‘reconciliation’.

The implications of this amendment are wide-reaching and have important implications for reconciliation across our community.

The term ‘colonisation’ is offensive to many people in our community and carries negative connotations.

It’s time that we give greater attention to those who have made, and those who continue to make, positive contributions towards reconciliation.

The change I’m proposing will legislate for a broader scope of persons famous in Australian fields for whom the Minister can have regard in determining a public place name. It will reflect a broader range of fields of relevance in contemporary society and to our diverse community and will clearly signal an important move away from glamourising colonisation and, instead, towards honouring reconciliation.

### **What is reconciliation**

At its heart, reconciliation is about strengthening the relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous Australians.

By contrast, colonisation is associated with devastating experiences of land dispossession, violence and racism.

To quote Reconciliation Australia:

*Reconciliation is an ongoing journey that reminds us that while generations of Australians have fought hard for meaningful change, future gains are likely to take just as much, if not more, effort.*

Kirstie Parker, a Board Member with Reconciliation Australia states that, for her:

*A reconciled Australia is one where our rights as First Australians are not just respected but championed in all the places that matter.*

The ACT should be proud of its 'Stretch' Reconciliation Action Plan, adopted by the Chief Minister's Directorate in April last year.

As its name suggests, it is far-reaching, and sets out a clear framework to April 2023, through five clear dimensions:

1. Race relations
2. Equality and equity
3. Institutional integrity
4. Unity and
5. Historical acceptance.

These dimensions mirror those of Reconciliation Australia and are an agreed path forward on a shared journey of reconciliation.

The Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan establishes reconciliation actions such as supporting the Ngunnawal Language Project; building strong relationships with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community; celebrating National Reconciliation Week; promoting reconciliation through the Directorate's sphere of influence; anti-discrimination strategies; cultural learning opportunities; demonstrating respect by observing cultural protocols; celebrating NAIDOC week; improving employment outcomes; improving economic and social outcomes; increasing access to services; and developing and supporting Indigenous tourism opportunities.

I understand that most, if not all, ACT Government Directorates also have similar Reconciliation Action Plans in place.

The ACT remains Australia's only jurisdiction to recognise Reconciliation Day, first celebrated here in 2018, and marked with a public holiday coinciding with national Reconciliation Week.

It's an opportunity for all Canberrans to learn about our shared histories, cultures and achievements, and to explore how each of us can contribute to achieving reconciliation in Australia.

At the heart of our reconciliation journey – as individuals, families, communities, organisations and a nation – are the relationships that we collectively build and the value that we recognise for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories, cultures and futures.

To me, reconciliation is all of this. It's recognition, respect, acknowledgement and celebration.

Madame Speaker, I believe that, by enabling greater recognition in public place names across the ACT, we will contribute to reconciliation with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. We will do this by bringing greater attention and focus to the contributions of people in Australia who have furthered the cause of reconciliation, and to their plight and purposes.

### **Existing ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Place Names**

We do already have two ACT suburbs which recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people important in Australia's history.

- Bonner is named after Senator Neville Bonner AO who was the first Indigenous person to enter Federal Parliament as the Liberal Senator for Queensland in 1971.
  - The suburb theme of Bonner is 'Indigenous leaders and their supporters' and I'm pleased to note 'Mabo Boulevard' in the suburb, in recognition of Eddie Mabo's pioneering role in campaigning for Indigenous land rights in Australia.
- Also, Nicholls is named after Sir Douglas Ralph Nicholls, a prominent Aboriginal man from the Yorta Yorta people – a professional footballer, Churches of Christ pastor and a pioneering campaigner for reconciliation; as well as being the Governor of South Australia from 1976-1979 and serving with the Australian Army in World War Two.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture more broadly is reflected in the language of many other ACT suburb and street names - including my home suburb of

Waramanga – derived from the cultural and language group name of the Warumungu people from the Tennent Creek district in the Northern Territory. Waramanga – every street is named after different Aboriginal tribal groups from around Australia.

While we already clearly have a great history of naming public places in the ACT in recognition of important Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and people, the legislative change I'm proposing will do more than just validate what's already being done.

It will signal a clear commitment from this Assembly that we honour reconciliation, and, in parallel, that we denounce the negative connotations of colonisation and the injustices it incites for too many people in our community.

### **Stakeholder support and consultation**

During the development of this Amendment Act, I engaged closely with the ACTs Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, who have provided their full support.

I wish to thank members of the ACTs Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body in particular, together with members of the United Nations Elder Council and the Healing Foundation for their ongoing commitment and dedication towards causes relevant to reconciliation and furthering the opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people.

I note that some of those people who have given their support, and worked with me in recent months, are here in the chamber today. Thank you for taking the time to be here. I look forward to continuing to work together.

And, of course, this legislation, if passed, is just the beginning of this work!

Significant community consultation will need to be undertaken by the Minister ahead of any consideration concerning recognition of a person important for reconciliation in Australia.

I look forward to continuing to play a role in ongoing community consultation.

## **Tent Embassy anniversary**

To introduce this Amendment Act today is quite timely.

This is the last week the Assembly will sit before the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, which was established on 26 January 1972.

As we all know, the Aboriginal Tent Embassy is a permanent protest occupation site to bring about attention and change for the political rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

Initially, it was established by four men under a beach umbrella!

It's come a long way since.

The Tent Embassy has been in its current location, on the lawns at the front of old Parliament Houses, since 1992.

It has and continues to serve as a stark reminder that we still have a long way to go, as a community and as a nation.

As of 2021, the focus of protests represented by the Aboriginal Tent Embassy have extended beyond land rights to also include Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination.

As we seek to move forward, together, as a community, it's fitting to make this important legislative Amendment to coincide with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Tent Embassy's establishment, which will occur on 26 January 2022.

## **Marisa's keen interest in Indigenous issues**

As many of you know, prior to commencing my position as an elected member for Murrumbidgee, I spent 15 years of my life working with remote Indigenous communities across the Northern Territory.

I have seen firsthand the challenges in communities, the struggle for rights and recognition, the implementation of policies that further entrench disadvantage and inequality. We have a long way to go in recognizing collective Indigenous rights in Australia, which is really central to a decolonising policy process.

## **Closing**

This Amendment to the Place Names Act is a fitting, and timely tribute, a move away from colonisation, and a symbolic contribution towards reconciliation.

I'm really pleased, on behalf of Murrumbidgee residents I represent, the ACT community to be tabling this Amendment Act in today's Assembly.

And I'm hopeful that debate might coincide with Reconciliation Week between 27 May and 3 June 2022, of which I note we have two sitting days on the first and second of June. - Just for the record, Madame Speaker!!

Always was, always will be, Aboriginal land.

Thank you.

## **Ends**