

DR MARISA PATERSON MLA SPEECH

21 September 2022

Debate close – Public Place Names Amendment Bill

Start

Any interested MLAs will speak/debate

{after all MLAs who are going to speak have spoken:}

DR MARISA PATERSON (Stand to speak):

SPEECH: DEBATE CLOSE

INTRO

Thank you, Madame Speaker.

I would like to start by thanking colleagues for their contributions to the debate; and to note that I am happy to close debate on the in-principle stage of the Public Names Amendment Bill 2021.

I am proud to stand here today, representing the people of Murrumbidgee, and Canberra more broadly, to stand here in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of the ACT, to effect positive change toward reconciliation.

It is poignant that this Bill's debate is happening today as the world mourns the passing of Her Majesty, the figurehead of colonialism across the commonwealth. The symbolism is not lost on me, that this Bill is passed in the Assembly today, to no longer hold colonisation and colonisers in the ACT

in high esteem – to tell the truth about our history and to now, in 2022 move to celebrate those people in our community that work for reconciliation. This is an opportunity for us to reflect on not only our past but our future as a nation. A future where truth-telling and reconciliation is at the heart.

In setting the tone for this amendment, I would like to quote from Stan Grant from a speech earlier this year;

“Reconciliation is about truth, and it is about justice, and it is about recognition in this country. It asks more of all of us. We have to bring real substance to this idea of reconciliation, we have to honour the memories of the people who have come before us, we have to live up to Peter Yu’s challenge, to all of us, to make reconciliation to mean something, to give it back its sense of moral purpose.

If reconciliation is going to mean anything to us, then we need to live up to the traditions of those who have come before us. Those great warriors, men and women who have fought for this country and are still promising a new future for this country. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who are asking Australians to walk with us to a better future. A future where we don’t turn away from the past, where we don’t silence our voices, but the voices of First Nations people are heard.”

Reconciliation is a verb.

Reconciliation is up to each and every one of us, each and every single day.

There are actions we can take every single day in our personal and professional lives to do more.

Madame Speaker, we have way too many statistics of how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are disadvantaged and discriminated against in the ACT and across the country.

Our criminal justice system has significant over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders experience significant health disadvantage, substantially greater than other Australians, particularly in relation to chronic and communicable diseases, infant health, mental health and life expectancy.

In the ACT we have the highest youth Indigenous incarceration rate in the country. According to the [Report on Government Services \(RoGS\)](#), the proportion of prisoners who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander in the ACT has doubled over the last ten years. The ACT also has Australia's highest rate of recidivism for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, with 91% of detainees having experienced prior imprisonment.

[28% of children entering out of home care are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children](#). In the [ACT, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people represent 17% of people seeking support from homeless services](#), despite making up just 1.3% of the ACT population.

The list goes on, and the data collected represents only part of the picture to the ongoing injustices faced by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

The path to justice is one I know we as a government are deeply committed to.

It is essential that effective solutions are developed with and by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Change will be achieved through many different aspects of reconciliation, including cultural integrity and identity, principles of an inclusive community, full economic participation, justice, community connections, lifelong learning, information sharing, respectful interactions, and leadership and decision-making from within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

I commend the work of colleagues in this Assembly, including Minister Stephen-Smith and the work in her portfolio responsibility including the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement and Impact Statement, as well as actions toward Treaty.

Labor Governments have consistently led the way in advancing the rights of First Nations people, a defining moment in our country's reconciliation process was the National Apology in 2008. Core to the speech was a recognition of harm and a commitment to ongoing truth telling. Fourteen years on, we are still in a position were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

people are victims of systemic injustice. To address such injustice, we must all commit towards the goal of truth telling and reconciliation.

The recently elected Labor Federal Government is making positive in-roads for the continued path toward reconciliation with Prime Minister Anthony Albanese making a very clear commitment to implement the Uluru Statement from the Heart, in full; as well as many other initiatives which will benefit reconciliation across Australia, for all Australians.

The upcoming referendum on the Voice to Parliament is a significant step, having direct Indigenous input into law and policy making, is essential to ensuring decision making is informed by people with a deep understanding of the communities it will affect. Indigenous communities must be able to take control of their own futures.

The commitment to ongoing truth-telling and healing through Makarrata Commission at a National level is a process that will awaken the Australian consciousness to the realities of our past. This will be a difficult process, but a necessary one for reconciliation. There is no treaty, or voice without truth-telling.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart offers a genuine partnership and a real chance for reconciliation. It calls for three things – Voice, Treaty and Truth. I look forward to seeing this implemented, and to the collaboration with First Nations people in the ACT and from across the country.

We need a shared sense of pride and understanding – of our history and of our shared future. Implementing the Uluru Statement from the Heart will go a long way toward this.

Moving forward

Madame Speaker, there are many Australians who have made important contributions and who have gone above and beyond in creating significant change toward reconciliation, and who continue to do so.

The amendments of this Bill legislate that those Australians can be recognised. And, I hope, the amendments may also go some way towards encouraging and inspiring others to do more in this space of reconciliation.

I am grateful to the community members who have helped to advise on this amendment, and especially to Paula McGrady, the Deputy Chairperson of the of the Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, her advice has been invaluable. When we spoke, it was clear how much this amendment meant to her. As she can't be here today, I want to read a quote from her;

“This is a significant moment for us as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in the ACT. My children were the first in my family to complete their year 12 certificates in NSW and ACT, this is still quite profound for me, as they have opportunities now that weren't historically destined for us.

Their ability to achieve this, I believe is largely due to the tireless advocacy and work of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our community. To be able to celebrate and acknowledge the people who have made sure that the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are recognised, and enabled us to live the lives we do, is a moment of great importance. There are countless people who deserve to be honoured for their work and this amendment will mean that they can finally get the recognition they deserve”.

The amendments of this Bill alone won't bring about reconciliation, but they will highlight and celebrate those who have and who are continuing to affect positive change. In doing so, greater attention will be drawn to celebrate the positive steps being taken by numerous individuals and will serve to shine a spotlight and to be an important reminder for us all about the ongoing need for reconciliation, and the benefits to be had.

The amendments proposed in this Bill align with contemporary community understandings and expectations. It's time we replace recognition of persons famous in Australian colonisation with persons famous in Australia's process toward reconciliation.

I look forward to seeing outcomes from this amendment – to seeing more public places in the ACT named in recognition of people important in Australia for purposes of reconciliation.

I commend the Bill to the Assembly and thank my colleagues for their tri-partisan support.

Thank you, Madame Speaker.

Always was, always will be, Aboriginal land

ENDS.

{Resume seat}

MADAME SPEAKER: The question is that this Bill be agreed to in principle. All those in favour say Aye. On the contrary No. The Ayes have it. The Bill is agreed to in-principle.

We will now move to the detail stage.

Is it the wish of the Assembly to dispense with the detail stage? - No.

DETAIL STAGE

SPEAKER: Is it the wish of the Assembly to take Clauses 1 to 4 together? Yes. *{nb – no amendments}*

SPEAKER: The question is that Clauses 1 to 4 be agreed to.

SPEAKER: The question is that the Bill be agreed to. All of that opinion, say Aye. The Bill is agreed to.