



COUNCILLOR TOM BRIGGS

SILVER ANNIVERSARY SPEECH

PARLIAMENT HOUSE, NSW

TUESDAY, JUNE 10, 2008

**PRODUCTIVE AND MEANINGFUL
PARTNERSHIPS**

(INTRODUCTION IN LANGUAGE)

(ACKNOWLEDGE COUNTRY, THE EORA NATION AND THE GADICAL PEOPLE)

**MY INTRODUCTION WAS A TRADITIONAL WELCOME TO ALL DISTINGUISHED GUESTS
IN MY MOTHER TONGUE.**

**AS MENTIONED BY OUR HOST, I AM A PROUD MEMBER OF THE GUMBAINGIRR NATION
BASED IN THE ARMIDALE DISTRICT.**

**I AM ALSO A PROUD MEMBER OF THE DORRIGO PLATEAU LOCAL ABORIGINAL LAND
COUNCIL.**

**IT GIVES ME GREAT PLEASURE TO JOIN MY FELLOW COUNCILLORS HERE TODAY FOR
THIS HISTORIC MEETING OF THE NEW SOUTH WALES ABORIGINAL LAND COUNCIL.**

**MY CHOSEN TOPIC TODAY IS STRATEGIC PRIORITY THREE FROM OUR CORPORATE
PLAN---PRODUCTIVE AND MEANINGFUL PARTNERSHIPS.**

**BUT BEFORE I ADDRESS THIS I JUST WANT TO RE-EMPHASISE A POINT MADE BY
MADAM CHAIR.**

**LAND RIGHTS WAS NEVER AN ECONOMIC PANACEA FOR ALL OF THE ECONOMIC AND
SOCIAL ILLS WHICH OUR PEOPLE HAVE SUFFERED THROUGH MORE THAN 200 YEARS
OF DISPOSSESSION.**

**AS MADAM CAHIR HAS REMINDED US.....FRANK WALKER RIGHTLY POINTED OUT IT
WAS A FIRST STEP.**

IT HAS GIVEN US A PLATFORM FROM WHICH TO REBUILD SHATTERED TRADITIONAL STRUCTURES.

IT HAS GIVEN US A VOICE.

THE KEY QUESTION IS: WHO IS LISTENING?

OUR COUNCIL IS FIRMLY COMMITTED TO THE PURSUIT OF STRONG, PRODUCTIVE AND MEANINGFUL PARTNERSHIPS WITH ALL RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS.

WE BELIEVE WE CAN ASSIST IN DELIVERING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL GROWTH AND PROSPERITY FOR OUR PEOPLE ACROSS ALL REGIONS OF NEW SOUTH WALES.

WE ARE COMMITTED TO DO SO BY:

- **IDENTIFYING AND DEVELOPING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL GROWTH and renewal**
- **STRENGTHENING EXISTING PARTNERSHIPS IN BOTH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS.**
- **AND DEVELOPING TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES, IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE LALC NETWORK, WHICH ENHANCE THE CAPACITY OF LOCAL ABORIGINAL LAND COUNCILS AND THEIR MEMBERS.**
- **WE AIM TO DO SO TO ENSURE THEIR MEMBERS EFFECTIVELY ENGAGE IN SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS WITH GOVERNMENT, NON GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS AT THE LOCAL COMMUNITY LEVEL.**

THESE ARE SIMPLY WORDS UNLESS WE PUT THEM INTO ACTION.

WE ARE DOING SO.

WE PLAN TO DO A LOT MORE.

WE CAN TALK.....BUT WE CANNOT WALK THIS PATH.....ALONE.

WE ARE MOVING FORWARD WITH OUR EDUCATION REVOLUTION.

WE ARE MOVING FORWARD WITH OUR WATER AND SEWERAGE INITIATIVE.

WE ARE MOVING FORWARD WITH A HOST OF OTHER PROGRAMS.

**BUT WE CANNOT CONTINUE TO MOVE BEYOND THOSE UNLESS OUR PARTNERSHIPS
ARE TRULY MEANINGFUL.**

ONLY THEN CAN THEY TRULY BE PRODUCTIVE.

**MY FELLOW COUNCILLORS AND I CONSIDER IT VITAL THAT WE BUILD CAPACITY AT
THE REGIONAL LEVEL**

**AND WHEN I SAY CAPACITY BUILDING I AM TALKING ABOUT BUILDING THE CAPACITY
OF OUR COMMUNITY THROUGH OUR STRONG FAMILY AND CLAN, AND
ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES.....AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ABORIGINAL
COMMUNITY JURISDICTION.**

**WE HEAR MUCH ABOUT THE NEED TO CHANGE THE MINDSET AMONG OUR PEOPLE.
AWAY FROM THE WELFARE MENTALITY INTO ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT.**

I AGREE.

**BUT I'M CONVINCED THE MINDSET OF THOSE ENGAGING WITH OUR PEOPLE IS IN
NEED OF RADICAL CHANGE.**

**CAPACITY BUILDING IN THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY CONTEXT NEEDS TO BE
BOTTOM UP.**

IT CANNOT WORK IF IT IS DRIVEN FROM THE TOP DOWN.

IF YOU DETECT A NOTE OF FRUSTRATION IN WHAT I AM SAYING....YOU ARE CORRECT.

**I HAVE SPENT MOST OF MY LIFE WORKING ON LOCAL AND REGIONAL ECONOMIC,
SOCIAL AND CULTURAL STRATEGIES ONLY TO SEE MOST OF THEM FOUNDER.**

**THEY HAVE DONE SO BECAUSE OF THE INABILITY OF GOVERNMENT AGENCIES TO
REALLY HEAR WHAT WE ARE SAYING.**

**I HAVE COME TO REALISE THAT GOVERNMENT AGENCIES SIMPLY DON'T RECOGNISE,
OR EXPECT, ACHIEVABLE LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES FROM
OUR PEOPLE.**

I'LL GIVE YOU AN EXAMPLE.

**I HAVE HERE TODAY A COPY OF A REGIONAL STRATEGY DEVELOPED IN 2004 BY THE
NORTHERN TABLELANDS ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES PLANNING FORUM**

THE FORUM WAS A COMMUNITY DRIVEN ORGANISATION OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ABORIGINAL NATIONS AND ABORIGINAL AGENCIES FROM THE NORTHERN TABLELANDS.

IT WAS A DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE.

IT WAS 8 YEARS IN THE MAKING)

IT COMPLIED WITH CONTEMPORARY STANDARDS OF GOOD GOVERNANCE AND SOUND MANAGEMENT.

IT WAS ESTABLISHED TO ENCOURAGE THE CO-OPERATION OF A LARGE AND DIVERSE NETWORK OF ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES AND AGENCIES.

IT BROUGHT TOGETHER ABORIGINAL ELDERS, COMMUNITY LEADERS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF LOCAL WORKING PARTIES TO HELP DEFINE THE ISSUES AND CONCERNS OF OUR PEOPLE IN OUR REGION.

IMPORTANTLY, IT WAS DRIVEN BY OUR ELDERS.

IT BROUGHT TOGETHER THE WISDOM, DRIVE AND DETERMINATION OF MORE THAN SIXTY ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY BASED ORGANISATIONS.

THEY COVERED A VAST TRACT OF LAND FROM URALLA IN THE SOUTH TO TENTERFIELD IN THE NORTH, ASHFORD IN THE WEST AND DORRIGO IN THE EAST.

THIS WAS THE NORTHERN TABLELANDS REGIONAL ABORIGINAL LAND COUNCIL REGION.

THIS AREA IS HOME TO LANGUAGE GROUPS INCLUDING THE ANAIWAN, DAINGATTI, KAMILAROI, BANBAI, GUMBAINGGIR, OARABAL AND NGOORABUL.

HISTORICALLY, RELATIONSHIPS HAD BEEN STRAINED BETWEEN THESE COMMUNITIES.

THE FORUM BROUGHT THEM TOGETHER.

THE STRATEGY WAS BUILT UP ON TRADITIONAL CORE VALUES:

- **PRIDE IN OUR ABORIGINALITY**
- **RESPECT FOR OUR ELDERS**
- **GRASS ROOTS INVOLVEMENT**
- **STATUS AS TRADITIONAL OWNERS**
- **HISTORICAL RIGHTS AS FIRST NATIONS**
- **PROTECTION OF OUR CHILDREN**
- **THE HEALTH AND WELL BEING OF OUR PEOPLE**
- **THE MAINTENANCE OF HERITAGE AND CULTURE.**

WE RECEIVED A SMALL AMOUNT OF FEDERAL FUNDING TO DEVELOP THE STRUCTURE WHICH WAS ALL ENCOMPASSING AND INTERCONNECTED.

IT WAS ACKNOWLEDGED BY THE CURRENT SPEAKER OF THIS PARLIAMENT, MR TORBAY, BOTH PUBLICLY AND IN THIS CHAMBER

IT WAS ACKNOWLEDGED BY THE THEN MINISTER FOR ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS, DOCTOR REFSHAUGE AND THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND.

THE CURRENT DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS WAS AN OFFICIAL GUEST AT THE SIGNING OF 11 ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY BASED ORGANISATIONS TO THE STRUCTURE IN GUYRA.

THE FEDERAL FUNDING RAN OUT.

OUR ASPIRATIONS OF DRIVING LOCAL AND REGIONAL CHANGE THROUGH OUR ELDERS AND OUR LOCAL ABORIGINAL LAND COUNCILS LITERALLY TURNED TO DUST.

THE KEY MESSAGE OF THE STRATEGY WAS THIS:

THE RENEWAL OF THESE STRUCTURES IS THE KEY TO THE RESTORATION AND INVIGORATION OF THE ABORIGINAL FAMILIES, CLANS, AND ABORIGINAL NATIONHOOD

IT IS ALSO THE KEY TO ESTABLISHING A MODEL OF PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE IN WHICH THE INHERENT AND TRADITIONAL GRASS ROOTS STRUCTURE OF ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES CAN BE ACTIVATED AS A CONTEMPORARY STRUCTURE OF MANAGEMENT, A PLATFORM FOR SELF DETERMINATION AND FOR GOOD, RELEVANT EVIDENCE BASED PUBLIC POLICY MAKING.

WE SAID IN THE DOCUMENT THE TIME WAS NOW RIGHT TO CONFRONT THESE ISSUES AS GOVERNMENTS INCREASINGLY SOUGHT MORE SOPHISTICATED APPROACHES TO PUBLIC POLICY.

BUT, SADLY, THE STRATEGY WENT NOWHERE.

THE LESSON WE LEARNED WAS CLEAR.

CONTRARY TO POPULAR PERCEPTION, OUR GREATEST IMPEDIMENT IS NOT OUR OWN FUNDAMENTAL LACK OF CAPACITY BUT RATHER THE PROBLEM OF OPERATING WITHIN AN ENTRENCHED AND INFLEXIBLE BUREAUCRACY.

BUREAUCRATS SIMPLY DO NOT WANT TO SHARE POWER.

THEY WANT TO TALK AT US, NOT WITH US.

WE NOW HAVE A SITUATION WHERE NEW LOCAL AND REGIONAL FORUM ARRANGEMENTS ARE BEING ESTABLISHED WITHOUT ANY REFERENCE TO WHAT HAS ALREADY BEEN IN PLACE.

IN ESSENCE, THEY ARE RE-INVENTING THE WHEEL.

OUR WHEEL ALREADY EXISTS FOR MY REGION.

THIS IS IT (HOLD DOCUMENT ALOFT)

THE FEDERAL SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMISSIONER TOM CALMA HAS SAID THERE NEEDS TO BE A RE-ENGAGEMENT WITH INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS ON THE BASIS OF MUTUAL RESPECT AND EQUALITY.

THERE NEEDS TO BE CLEAR PROCESSES AND CERTAINTY OF STRUCTURES FOR INDIGENOUS REPRESENTATION AND ADVOCACY.

THIS COUNCIL HAS SHOWN IT IS PREPARED TO WORK WITH GOVERNMENT, AND ALL OTHER STAKEHOLDERS, ON INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO WHAT SOME CONSIDER TO BE INTRACTABLE PROBLEMS.

BUT, IN MY EXPERIENCE, A MAJOR STUMBLING BLOCK IS THAT, IN PRACTICE, GOVERNMENTS THROUGH THEIR PUBLIC SECTOR MANAGEMENT, DISTORT THE DEFINITION OF CAPACITY BUILDING.

RATHER THAN PROMOTING THE CAPACITY FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT BY ABORIGINAL PEOPLE THEY ARE LOOKING ONLY TOWARDS POLICY COMPLIANCE BY ABORIGINAL PEOPLE.

IF OUR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES ARE TO CHANGE IN ANY MEANINGFUL WAY CAPACITY MUST BE EVIDENT AND ACTIVE AT THE POLICY FORMULATION STAGE.....NOT MERELY AT THE LEVEL OF POLICY EXPLANATION.

LET US BE HONEST WITH EACH OTHER.

WHEN WE CONSIDER THE PRESENT STATUS OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN THIS COUNTRY WE MUST RECONGISE THERE HAS BEEN A LONG HISTORY OF POLICY FAILURE.

THAT IS NOW ACCEPTED BY ALL SIDES OF POLITICS.

WE ARE ALL HERE TODAY TO PAY HOMAGE TO THOSE WHO HAVE DELIVERED THE HARD WON GAINS OF THE PAST 25 YEARS.

THE LAND RIGHTS ACT HAS DELIVERED, AND IS DELIVERING, LASTING BENEFITS TO OUR PEOPLE.

OUR JOB IS TO BUILD ON THOSE.

OUR JOB IS TO SEIZE ON PRESENT AND FUTURE POSSIBILITIES.

THERE IS NO BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS BUT THERE ARE DIRECTIONS THAT HAVE NOT BEEN FULLY EXPLORED.

WE NEED PARLIAMENTS AND GOVERNMENTS WILLING TO TRANSFORM RHETORIC INTO ACTION AND TO RESPECT US IN THE TRUE SPIRIT OF PARTNERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION.

THIS COUNCIL STANDS READY TO WORK IN TRUE SPIRIT AND PARTNERSHIP WITH THOSE WHO WILL WALK WITH US.

THE THEME THAT THE ABORIGINAL ELDERS GAVE TO THE REGIONAL GOVERNANCE MODEL I HAVE TALKED ABOUT TODAY IN GUMBANGIRR LANGUAGE WAS THIS:

NGIYAA GADILLA MAYALAMBA MAARLA IRRI GYYJAA NGIYAA WARU WARUM!

THIS ROUGHLY TRANSLATES TO:

WE MUST SHAKE HANDS TOGETHER BEFORE WE CAN MOVE FORWARD AS ABORIGINAL PEOPLE.

I'D ASK ALL OF THE PARLIAMENTARIANS AND BUREAUCRATS IN THIS CHAMBER TODAY TO PUT THESE WORDS INTO ACTION.

THANK YOU.

