



COUNCILLOR STEVE GORDON

SILVER ANNIVERSARY SPEECH

PARLIAMENT HOUSE, NSW

TUESDAY, JUNE 10, 2008

TALKING TREATY

I'D LIKE TO JOIN MADAM CHAIR AND COUNCILLOR BRIGGS IN ACKNOWLEDGING AND PAYING MY RESPECTS TO THE TRADITIONAL OWNERS OF THE LAND UPON WHICH WE STAND TODAY.

IT IS A PLEASURE TO BE HERE TODAY AMONG MY FELLOW COUNCILLORS AND SO MANY DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, BOTH BLACK AND WHITE

I HAD THE HONOUR OF SPEAKING IN THIS CHAMBER TEN YEARS AGO.

I APPRECIATE THAT THIS OCCASION IS REMEMBERED WITH A PHOTOGRAPH WHICH SITS ON ONE OF THE WALLS OF THIS PARLIAMENT.

I WAS A LOT YOUNGER THEN....BUT I'M TOLD.....NOT AS DAPPER.....OR GOOD LOOKING!

I SPOKE THEN AS THE LONGEST SERVING MEMBER OF THE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMISSION.

THE OCCASION WAS THE SECOND ANNUAL BLACK PARLIAMENT.

IT WAS A FORUM OF STATE PARLIAMENTARIANS AND ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES FROM ATSIC AND THE NEW SOUTH WALES ABORIGINAL LAND COUNCIL

IT WAS HELD ON WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 1998.

IT WAS THE LAST TIME---BEFORE TODAY----THAT A GROUP OF DULY ELECTED ABORIGINAL PEOPLE HAD COME TOGETHER IN THIS PARLIAMENT, THE OLDEST IN AUSTRALIA.

I SINCERELY HOPE THIS WILL NOT BE THE LAST TIME....BUT I WILL COME BACK TO THAT LATER.

FIRSTLY, I'D LIKE TO TALK ABOUT THIS COUNCIL'S NEWLY ADOPTED CORPORATE PLAN.

THE FIRST PRIORITY IN THAT PLAN COMMITS OUR COUNCIL TO PURSUE AN ADVOCACY AND RIGHTS AGENDA FOR OUR PEOPLE.

IT COMMITS US TO WORK TO:

INFLUENCE THE POLICY AND REFORM AGENDAS OF THE NEW SOUTH WALES AND COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENTS.

WE SEEK TO DO THAT THROUGH LEADERSHIP.

WE SEEK TO DO THAT THROUGH RELIABLE EVIDENCE-BASED ADVICE AND RESEARCH.

IN KEEPING WITH THIS.....COUNCIL DECIDED AT ITS MOST RECENT MEETING TO BEGIN A SERIES OF OCCASIONAL SURVEYS OF ALL MEMBERS OF LOCAL ABORIIGINAL LAND COUNCILS.

THERE ARE MORE THAN TWENTY THOUSAND OF THEM.

WE WILL BE DOING THESE SURVEYS TO ASSIST COUNCIL GAIN A BETTER VIEW FROM THE LAND RIGHTS NETWORK ON MAJOR POLICY AND ADVOCACY ISSUES.

WE HAVE CHOSEN TWO ISSUES TO BEGIN THIS PROCESS.

BOTH ARE VERY CLOSE TO MY HEART.....AND THOSE I WAS ELECTED TO REPRESENT.

THEY ARE THE PROPOSED NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE BODY AND THE QUESTION OF A TREATY.

THEY HAVE BEEN CHOSEN BECAUSE OF THEIR TOPICALITY AND NSWALC'S HISTORY IN RELATION TO THE TREATY NOW CAMPAIGN.

I'M SURE EVERYONE WOULD AGREE.....WE NEED TO HAVE A CLEAR POSITION ON BOTH AS THE PEAK ABORIGINAL REPRESENTATIVE BODY IN THIS STATE

COUNCIL NEEDS ITS POSITION TO BE INFORMED BY OUR PRINCIPAL CLIENT BASE, THE MEMBERSHIP OF LOCAL ABORIGINAL LAND COUNCILS.

I WOULD URGE ALL ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN NEW SOUTH WALES TO LET US KNOW WHAT THEY THINK ABOUT THESE IMPORTANT ISSUES.

YOU WILL RECALL THE THEN LABOR PRIME MINISTER BOB HAWKE PROMISED US A TREATY WHEN HE SPOKE AT BARUNGA IN 1988.

HE DID NOT KEEP HIS WORD.

INSTEAD WE GOT A POLICY OF NATIONAL RECONCILIATION.

THE WHEEL HAS NOW TURNED FULL CIRCLE.

THE CURRENT FEDERAL LABOR GOVERNMENT HAS NOW COME TO OFFICE PROMISING TO IMPLEMENT THE RECOMMENDATIONS MADE IN 2000 BY THE COUNCIL FOR ABORIGINAL RECONCILIATION.

IT SAYS IT WILL USE THE COUNCIL'S AUSTRALIAN DECLARATION TOWARDS RECONCILIATION AS A BASIS FOR ACTION.

THIS COMMITS RUDD LABOR TO WORKING TOWARDS A TREATY.

IT WAS THE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMISSION WHICH ENSURED THAT RECONCILIATION DOCUMENT RECOMMENDED A TREATY OR SETTLEMENT.

THIS GAVE RISE TO ATSIAC'S TREATY NOW CAMPAIGN WHICH WAS ENDORSED BY NSWALC AT THE TIME.

IT IS IMPORTANT FOR ME TO POINT OUT THAT NSWALC'S SUPPORT AND ENDORSEMENT FOLLOWED BROAD CONSULTATION WITH THE LALC NETWORK.

I'VE BEEN INVOLVED IN POLITICS ALL MY LIFE. I TAKE GREAT PRIDE IN BEING NAMED NSW NAIDOC PERSON OF THE YEAR IN 2002.

I'VE LEARNED ONE THING.

MAINSTREAM POLITICIANS WILL NOT IMPLEMENT POLICIES TO ADVANCE THE RIGHTS, INTERESTS AND ASPIRATIONS OF OUR PEOPLE WITHOUT CONSTANT LOBBYING BY ABORIGINAL REPRESENTATIVES.

IT IS THE VIEW OF COUNCIL THAT NSWALC SHOULD BE AT THE FOREFRONT OF LOBBYING EFFORTS IN LINE WITH OUR STATUTORY OBJECTS AND FUNCTIONS AND OUR CORPORATE PRIORITIES.

OUR VOICE WILL BE STRENGTHENED BY THE SUPPORT OF OUR MEMBERS.

THIS BRINGS ME TO THE NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE BODY WHICH WILL REPLACE ATSIAC.

YOU MIGHT RECALL JOHN HOWARD CAME INTO OFFICE VOWING TO GUT AND GAG AND EVENTUALLY ABOLISH ATSIAC.

SADLY, HE KEPT HIS WORD.

HE ABOLISHED ATSIAC IN JULY 1, 2004.

SADLY, IT WAS AN EX-NSWALC STAFFER THAT GAVE HIM HIS LEAD.

.....THE THEN FEDERAL LABOR LEADER MARK LATHAM WHO WAS SACKED BY THIS ORGANISATION.

THAT FELLA CERTAINLY KNOWS A BIT ABOUT THE DARK ART OF POLITICAL PAYBACK.

THAT ACT ROBBED ABORIGINAL PEOPLE OF OUR NATIONAL VOICE AND Demeaned MANY ABORIGINAL LEADERS.

THE RUDD GOVERNMENT IS COMMITTED TO DEVELOPING A STRONG POLITICAL RELATIONSHIP WITH A NEW NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE BODY.

IMPORTANTLY, IT IS COMMITTED TO BE ACCOUNTABLE TO IT

IT IS ALSO COMMITTED TO FINALISING THE STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS OF THE NEW BODY IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE.

WE NEED TO BE READY TO ENGAGE.

WE NEED TO ENSURE MR RUDD KEEPS HIS WORD.

I CANNOT LET THIS OCCASION PASS WITHOUT COMMENT ON HOWARD'S LAST DESPERATE ACT...THE INTERVENTION IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY.

SOMETHING HAD TO BE DONE TO MAKE THINGS BETTER.

OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY HAD BEEN CRYING OUT FOR DECADES TO BE LISTENED TO.

THEY HAD BEEN CALLING FOR BETTER LAW AND ORDER TO PROTECT THEMSELVES AND THEIR CHILDREN.

THEY HAD BEEN CALLING OUT FOR BETTER HEALTH SERVICES AND BETTER HOUSING.

THOSE WHO HAVE DONE WRONG NEED TO BE DEALT WITH...STRONGLY.

BUT TO REDUCE A PEOPLE TO THE STATUS OF BEGGARS IN THEIR OWN LAND CANNOT IN ANY RATIONAL AND FAIR MINDED PERSON'S THINK BE ACCEPTABLE.

SUCH THINKING MUST BE CHALLENGED.

LISTENING TO MADAM CHAIR'S SPEECH TODAY I WAS STRUCK ONCE AGAIN BY THE GAINS WE HAVE MADE IN NEW SOUTH WALES.

THE LAND RIGHTS MODEL ADOPTED IN THIS PARLIAMENT TWENTY FIVE YEARS AGO IS A TEMPLATE FOR A NEW NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE BODY.

I BELIEVE IT HAS BEEN SUSTAINED BY THE STRONG TRI-PARTISAN COMMITMENT OF ALL PARTIES IN THIS PARLIAMENT.

I SINCERELY THANK THEM FOR THAT.

I NOW WANT TO TURN TO THE QUESTION OF IMPROVING OR ENHANCING THE REPRESENTATION OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN MAINSTREAM POLITICS AND THEIR OWN REPRESENTATIVE POLITICS.

THIS HAS LONG BEEN DISCUSSED, DEBATED, AND DISSECTED.

MANY CALLS FOR INCREASED REPRESENTATION HAVE SOUGHT THE INTRODUCTION OF DEDICATED SEATS FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE TO BUILD ON THE GAINS ALREADY ACHIEVED THROUGH THE LAND RIGHTS MOVEMENT.

CALLS FOR DEDICATED SEATS FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN BOTH THE STATE AND FEDERAL PARLIAMENT HAVE BEEN MADE AND REJECTED FOR ALMOST A CENTURY.

I WILL MENTION ONE.

IN 1938 THE ABORIGINES PROGRESSIVE ASSOCIATION, IN RESPONSE TO THE CELEBRATIONS OF 150 YEARS OF WHITE INVASION, HELD A PROTEST MEETING IN SYDNEY ON AUSTRALIA DAY WHICH THEY CALLED THE DAY OF MOURNING.

AT THE TIME AN ABORIGINAL DELEGATION MET WITH PRIME MINISTER JOE LYONS AND PRESENTED HIM WITH A TEN POINT PETITION FOR ABORIGINAL "EQUALITY."

IT INCLUDED A DEMAND FOR REPRESENTATION IN THE FEDERAL PARLIAMENT FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE AS ONE MEANS OF THEM HAVING MORE CONTROL OVER THEIR DESTINIES.

IT WAS DISMISSED.

THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DAY OF MOURNING WAS MARKED IN JANUARY THIS YEAR.

WE WILL ALSO MARK ANOTHER ANNIVERSARY THIS YEAR.

NOVEMBER WILL SEE THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PUBLICATION OF A REPORT OF A NSW PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO THE ISSUE OF DEDICATED SEATS FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN THIS PARLIAMENT.

IT WAS PRODUCED BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES, WHICH IS PRESENTLY CONDUCTING THE CLOSING THE GAP INQUIRY.

AT THE TIME OF THE 1998 COMMITTEE'S REPORT NO ABORIGINAL PERSON HAD EVER BEEN ELECTED TO EITHER OF THE TWO HOUSE OF THE NEW SOUTH WALES PARLIAMENT.

IT IS WORTH NOTING THERE HAVE BEEN OVER 2,000 MEMBERS ELECTED TO THIS PARLIAMENT SINCE THE FIRST NSW LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL WAS CONSTITUTED IN 1924.

WE NOW HAVE ONE ABORIGINAL MP, THE LABOR MEMBER FOR CANTERBURY, MS BURNEY, OUT OF A TOTAL NUMBER OF MORE THAN 150 IN THIS PARLIAMENT.

THERE ARE NO ABORIGINAL MP'S AMONG THE 226 MEMBERS OF THE FEDERAL PARLIAMENT.

THE TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE CURRENT CLOSING THE GAP INQUIRY INCLUDE THE NEED TO CONSIDER GOVERNMENT RESPONSES TO ALL PREVIOUS INQUIRY'S BY THIS COMMITTEE ON ISSUES AFFECTING ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN NSW.

THIS MEANS THE CURRENT INQUIRY WILL REVIEW THE 1998 REPORT ON ENHANCING ABORIGINAL POLITICAL REPRESENTATION.

THE REPORT OF THAT COMMITTEE FOUND SIGNIFICANT SUPPORT AND ENTHUSIASM FOR THE CONCEPT OF DEDICATED SEATS AMONG THOSE IT CONSULTED, INCLUDING KEY ABORIGINAL ORGANISATIONS (INCLUDING NSWALC)

HOWEVER, THERE WAS LITTLE AGREEMENT ON THE MECHANICS OF DEDICATED SEATS AND THE COMMITTEE CONCLUDED THERE SHOULD BE MORE CONSULTATION ON THIS WHOLE QUESTION.

THE COMMITTEE SAID IT WAS FIRMLY CONVINCED ABORIGINAL PEOPLE SHOULD FORMULATE INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE ABORIGINAL REPRESENTATION.

IT BELIEVED THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ABORIGINAL ASSEMBLY SHOULD BE CONSIDERED, AS AN INTERIM MEASURE, PENDING THAT CONSULTATION.

I'D REMIND YOU THAT THE LAST ANNUAL BLACK PARLIAMENT WAS HELD IN THE YEAR OF THE COMMITTEE'S FINAL REPORT.

THE COMMITTEE'S REPORT WAS NEVER ACTED UPON.

THE BLACK PARLIAMENT NEVER HELD AGAIN.

DURING DEBATE ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ATSIAC THE THEN OPPOSITION LEADER MR HOWARD CLAIMED IT WOULD DEVELOP INTO A SEPARATIST AND DIVISIVE BLACK PARLIAMENT.

THERE WAS NOTHING SEPARATIST OR DIVISIVE ABOUT THE BLACK PARLIAMENTS HELD IN NEW SOUTH WALES, WHICH WERE ATTENDED BY THE THEN PREMIER, MR CARR, AND OPPOSITION LEADER, MR COLLINS.

I WOULD HOPE THE CURRENT LEGISLATIVE STANDING COMMITTEE REVISITS THIS CONCEPT IN ITS REPORT LATER THIS YEAR.

THE SUPPORT FOR THIS MEETING FROM REPRESENTATIVES FROM ALL SIDES OF POLITICS, AND THEIR ATTENDANCE, HERE TODAY IS ANOTHER SMALL STEP ALONG THE ROAD.

I WANT TO FINISH BY REMINDING YOU OF WHAT FRANK WALKER SAID WHEN HE STOOD HERE 25 YEARS AGO TO INTRODUCE THIS LEGISLATION.

HE TOLD THE PARLIAMENT OUR PEOPLE WERE VIRTUALLY AT THE BOTTOM OF EVERY SOCIAL INDICATOR OF PROSPERITY AND WELL BEING.

SADLY THAT HAS NOT CHANGED.

WE ARE STILL DYING YOUNGER.

WE ARE STILL SUFFERING BAD HOUSING, POOR HEALTH AND POOR EDUCATION.

THIS IS WHAT IS HOLDING US DOWN.

THIS LEGISLATION HAS BROUGHT SOME BENEFIT.

THE MABO DECISION, WHICH OVERTURNED THE MYTH OF TERRA NULLIUS, ALSO DELIVERED SOME BENEFIT BUT SADLY IT HAS ALSO BECOME A POINT WE CANNOT MOVE PAST.

IT HAS BECOME A SOURCE OF CONFLICT WITHIN OUR OWN PEOPLE AND WITH OUR FELLOW AUSTRALIANS.

WE NEED TO SIT DOWN TOGETHER AND RESOLVE THESE DIFFERENCES IN ORDER TO ENSURE WE ARE NOT SITTING HERE IN TWENTY FIVE YEARS RECITING THE SAME STATISTICS.

THANK YOU.

