

Mayor Melva Hobson

Quandamooka Native Title Celebrations speech

Dunwich 4 July 2011

Acknowledgements;

- Uncle Bob Anderson,
- Uncle Ian Delaney,
- Aunty Joan Hendriks, Aunty Evelyn Parkin, Mrs Bernita Mabo, Aunty Rene Cleary, the beautiful Ebony Burns and Patricia Walker
- Tony McAvoy
- John Sosso
- Councillor Craig Ogilvy and other fellow Redland City Councillors and local politicians
- Distinguished guests

At this historic turning point in our relationship to land and to each other, and on this day of all days it gives me great pleasure to acknowledge the Quandamooka people as the traditional, and now legally recognised, owners of this island – Minjerriba.

On behalf of Council, I am honoured to accept the welcome to country generously offered to us by Nughi Elder, Dr Robert V Anderson OAM (Uncle Bob), and by the island dancers and songmen.

To you; to the members of the Quandamooka Elders in Council; to Aunty Margaret Iselin and the Minjerriba-Moorgumpin Elders in Council; and to all other Elders present, I thank you - for your hospitality today and, for your enduring wisdom, dignity and leadership.

Humbly, I pay respect to you and your ancestors. Perhaps they are here with you and other descendants of the Noonuccal, Gorempul and Nughi clans today. You might sense their spirit in the breezes off the bay; in the reeds on the shoreline; or in the clear water deep within the sand.

Certainly, in your memory they are kept alive and we honour them on this very special occasion.

I would also like to pay tribute to the Quandamooka family representatives and other Aboriginal community leaders present.

For so many years you have campaigned passionately for land justice. Overcoming many hurdles along the way you have worked tirelessly to secure rights to land that you know have been yours for thousands of years.

During intensive native title negotiations with Council you have driven a hard bargain in the interests of your people.

I know and you know it has been difficult at times. For you, and for Council, there have been many complex matters to settle. Despite this, at every stage of this exhausting process you have acted with impeccable ethics and professionalism.

For this, and for your dedication, determination and diligence at the negotiating table I salute you.

It is the collective effort of the whole Quandamooka community that has created today's landmark moment. However, I acknowledge those of you who have taken on a greater burden at different times: the Quandamooka Land Council over many years, and its current president, Darren Burns; and also Uncle Ian Delaney, your claimant for 15 years.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Quandamooka people have achieved a significant victory because of their leadership and faithful adherence to traditional law and custom. And, they have graciously welcomed the rest of us to join with them in celebrating it.

This reflects a generosity of spirit that is extraordinary when you think of the many injustices they have suffered at the hands of colonists and successive governments of this place.

It is all the more remarkable when you consider that land rights under the Native Title Act, are in fact extremely limited, especially compared with freehold rights enjoyed by other Redland citizens.

So, while there is much to celebrate today, I think too it is important I acknowledge the limits, as well as the potentials, of today's court orders from the perspective of native title holders.

The right to negotiate about land use is the key substantive right won today by Minjerriba's first people. Along with recognition of traditional ownership in law, it is not insignificant and will be given practical effect through the ILUA negotiated with Council.

Nevertheless, I suspect that Vincent Lingiari; Eddie Mabo; and other Australian land rights heroes - including those present - would have hoped for more.

It therefore behoves us all - especially we relative newcomers to this land, to reflect on the compromises the Native Title Act requires of Quandamooka people, as well as the benefits it offers them. The persistent claim for indigenous sovereignty, for instance, is not affected by today's court orders. In law it cannot be.

The agreement council solemnly commits itself to today is forged by, and written in, law. In our decision-making we have been driven by the imperatives of the National Native Title Act and the Queensland Local Government Act.

The first requires that we compensate Quandamooka people for our breaches of their native title rights. The second requires us to act in the interests of all current and future Redlands citizens; by protecting access to key public assets, for instance. Council has negotiated an agreement that balances and serves both these legal obligations.

Quandamooka people have had to strike an even trickier balance: between their traditional law - refined and expressed in culture over centuries, and whitefella law, imposed without consent and, at times with tragic consequences as history unambiguously records.

Today though, the traditional laws and customs of Quandamooka Country have at last been recognised in the federal court; right here at Goompi – at Dunwich. They will be respected under Australian and Council law forever. This interlinking of two systems of law forms one building block in the cornerstone of this island's future.

As Mayor, along with several councillors and senior officers, I have been personally committed to making a big leap forward for reconciliation in the Redlands.

My story began in Darwin where I was born and my father worked as a Methodist Minister on the Goulbourn Island mission.

My father loved and respected the people he sought to serve and instilled in me the same respect for Australia's indigenous people that has stayed with me strongly throughout my life. He would be pleased with my involvement in the events leading up to today.

I know we have further to go, but the native title agreement I sign today, will make a big difference. It provides a firm foundation for future leaders of Council and of Quandamooka country to enhance and integrate their governance of this place.

The formula for success, I believe, is law plus leadership; both whitefella and blackfella way. If we can find a way to squeeze the best out of our law and our leadership - separately and together - we will create the prosperous and sustainable future we all seek for North Stradbroke Island.

When I talk of leadership, I don't mean just representing constituents although this is obviously a central ingredient. Leadership to me means much more than this, and has been demonstrated I think by all parties in reaching the agreements we sign today.

Leaders, by definition, are required to forge ahead for their people, not simply follow them lamely. Dealing only with modest visions is a recipe for entrapment in an endless now. It does no justice to the needs or rights of future as well as current generations.

Grappling only with limitations and not possibilities is not the kind of leadership this island needs at this point in its history. On the contrary, now is the time for

leaders of all parties with an interest to embrace wider, deeper and longer views; to nurture big visions and lead their people into new understandings, new relationships, new enterprises and new possibilities.

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls - leaders of today and tomorrow - we know there are many challenges ahead as we navigate new territory in island land management, economic development and cultural and social arrangements.

With strong leadership of all parties, and strengthening partnerships between us, I am confident that we will steadily improve the wellbeing and prosperity of all islanders. We will nurture new businesses that leverage Straddie's cultural assets rather than damage its natural assets.

[On behalf of Councillor Craig Ogilvie]

Councillor Craig Ogilvie has been involved for several years in the discussions and negotiations leading to today's historic native title agreements.

On Craig's behalf I would like to read to you some words he has asked me to convey to you.

Thanks to everyone for allowing me to be part of this special moment.

I first became involved back in the late 90's when the then council started the NSI/Minjerribah Native Title Planning Study and my involvement escalated once elected in 2004.

There have been a lot of people involved since long, long before that, and some of them not here with us today. I'm sure all of them are celebrating with us here in spirit though.

From a Council perspective, in recent times, Judy Spokes, Michael Tait, Roberta Bonin, Dan Carter and Andrew Ross have been critical to completing the Council ILUA.

Council itself, voted unanimously for the ILUA to proceed. The negotiations were conducted with great spirit and professionalism and thanks to all those who sat in on those discussions.

It used to bother me greatly that people would travel to this island and have no knowledge of the prior occupation and traditional ownership of the local people dating back many a millennia.

That will all change now.

In addition though, traditional owners are now empowered to have a say in what happens here and the tools to secure the community's future. I have no doubt that the current generation of leadership will serve this community well and that the generation behind them will carry on their good work.

Amongst the current generation there are great heroes – it is easy to be critical, it is hard to lead. My hat goes off to those who have doggedly pursued this outcome.

When I was a young man I used to sing and dance (badly) along to a song by Midnight Oil, called 'The Beds are Burning' – many of you would know it.

The verse is; "the time has come to say fairs fair, to pay the rent to pay our share..." and concludes "how do we sleep while the beds are burning? How do we sleep while the world is turning?"

Tonight, in this community, we can all sleep well knowing that some justice has been done here.

And we used to sing along to another song by Paul Kelly and Kev Carmody about Vincent Lingiari and the Gurinji strike that had the line; “from little things big things grow.”

This is the end of a journey and it is the beginning of another.

Now that Quandamooka native title claims for Straddie are finally resolved – importantly by consent of the parties - we have what may be the best opportunity in our lifetime to create a brighter, fairer and more productive future for all island residents.

On behalf of Council, just one of the custodians of this place, I look forward to playing our part alongside you - the people of the sand and sea.

(End)