

## **ADDRESS ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING OF PARLIAMENT, 25 MARCH 2015, BY UNCLE JOE KIRK<sup>1</sup>**

It has been really great, as an Aboriginal elder, to be invited to this special opening of parliament. It is a privilege when we see that Aboriginals have a part in government in Queensland. It is really a great achievement. As a young boy who came from a government reserve, I know how hard it is to be under government rule. It plays a really important part to all of us as Aboriginals and non-Aboriginal people.

I first of all would like to say that Aboriginal law never changes. It is not like the law in parliament that changes from time to time. Aboriginal law never changes. From our point of view, as Aboriginal elders, I would like to acknowledge another elder who is with me today, Aunty Valda Coolwell, who is a prominent elder in our community and throughout Queensland. Aunty Valda does a lot of work in her community and throughout Queensland. She is a valuable elder within our community who is well spoken and well respected by us. There are 20 elders here in Brisbane who do a lot of work for our community, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

It has been a privilege to be an elder and part of our community. As elders it has also been a great thing to be part of Queensland government. No matter what government has been in, we have always been there. It took until 2007 to see our flag fly outside of parliament. Along with other radical parties that I was involved with way back in the 60s, I was one of the troublesome young boys who were hanging on the fence outside to try and get those flags recognised. We have come a long way as an Aboriginal community and as a people. As Queensland is a multicultural state, we have done a lot of things for every ethnic group and for everybody that comes our way who wants to live in Queensland.

It was only last week that I was taking notice of the number plates on our vehicles—and it was the former Premier who started this—that say 'Smart State'. We became a smart state through Mr Beattie. But now most of our number plates say 'Queensland: the Sunshine State'. Sadly, some of us Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people have not seen that sun for a long time. Just like we had a prayer a moment ago, I pray that we will see a better sun in Queensland and that it will be a sunshine state for all our families within the state; that we will all share together in reconciliation; that we will all be one as Queenslanders; and that we will have a smart state and a sunshine state. We look forward to that—not only Indigenous people but also all people in Queensland.

It has been a great opportunity for me to be welcomed here again as one of the elders and to acknowledge the custodians of this land which, as you know, has been here for 60,000 years. We have not come from anywhere else; we have been here a long time. Our ancestors were here long before any white man came. We will soon be celebrating Anzac Day, and I hope we all take that on board as we celebrate the Indigenous soldiers and non-Indigenous diggers who fought for our country so that we can sit here today without fear. When the Governor arrived we saw the armed forces personnel, and we are proud that they are serving our country. They represent us as all Queenslanders.

The Turrbal people of this land have been here a long time, and we are going to be out in the courtyard and we are going to feel the grass and the earth under our feet—just like we

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<sup>1</sup> Uncle Joe Kirk, Turrabal Elder, was invited to address the new Parliament at the opening ceremony on 25 March 2015. This edited version is taken from the uncorrected proof of Hansard, taken from the Parliament House website: [https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/hansard/2015/2015\\_03\\_25\\_DAILY.pdf](https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/hansard/2015/2015_03_25_DAILY.pdf).

still do as Aboriginal people. We still walk on the grass whenever we can, even though there is concrete and cement. Today we celebrate our new parliament, which is a great thing.

I have shared many cups of tea and many platforms with our new Premier, Annastacia Palaszczuk. We love her, and Aboriginal people have a lot to do with her. There are many things we sat down and spoken about. Since I became an elder I have had many opportunities to share a lot of new ideas with different Premiers so that we can make this a better state for all. Each and every one of us has concerns. Things are not very bright out there at the moment and a lot of our families are suffering, but I know that this new government will look across-the-board at families for today that will go on and be families for tomorrow.

Thank you for our new Governor; thank you for our new Speaker; thank you for our new parliament; and thank you for our new Premier. I know that things are going to happen within our state this year.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the work that the opposition leader and former ministers have done over the years. I have had a lot of dealings with them as well, and I thank them for addressing Indigenous issues when they were in government. As Aboriginal people, we will not forget. We have a long memory and we still remember what has been done for Indigenous people right across-the-board in our state—not only for Indigenous people but also for all Queenslanders so that we can be a sunshine state.

*Uncle Joe Kirk then welcomed the new parliament in the traditional language of the Turrbal people.*

UNCLE JOE KIRK: That means, 'Hello. Welcome to this sacred and special place for all Queenslanders, and may God bless us all.'