

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is that the motion be deferred until Thursday 20 February 2020.

Motion agreed to.

Debate adjourned.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Nelson, in response to your initial question, now that the motion has passed it will remain the priority of the Assembly on Thursday. As it is Assembly business, it will be before the House before any other matter.

TREATY COMMISSIONER BILL (Serial 119)

Ms UIBO (on behalf of Treaty): Mr Deputy Speaker, I present a bill entitled Treaty Commissioner Bill 2020 and table a copy of the explanatory statement and a statement of compatibility with human rights as defined in section 3 of the Commonwealth *Human Rights (Parliamentary Scrutiny) Act 2011*.

I move that the bill be now read a first time.

Whilst the bill itself is relatively straightforward, it has the potential to re-shape the relationship that the Northern Territory Government has with Aboriginal Territorians. Indeed, I suggest it is already re-shaping that relationship in a positive way.

In the lead-up to the 2016 election, NT Labor made a commitment to have a meaningful conversation with Aboriginal Territorians about treaty. We kept that promise.

At a historic meeting with the Chairs of the Anindilyakwa, Central, Northern and Tiwi Land Councils in Alice Springs, this government agreed to form a Treaty Working Group, comprising representatives of the four land councils and the Northern Territory Government. The role of the Treaty Working Group was to develop a memorandum of understanding that would describe a process under which future treaties could be negotiated.

The treaty working group—Co-chaired by me, as Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and the recently re-elected Chair of the Northern Land Council, Mr Sammy Bush-Blanas—was set the onerous task of developing the MoU with a very tight time frame—it needed to be signed at the Barunga Festival in June 2018. As we all now know, in a fantastic example of how land councils and the government can work together, this was achieved.

The primary purposes of this bill are twofold. Firstly, as outlined in clause 4 of the bill, to implement the memorandum of understanding signed between the Northern Territory Government and the four land councils at Barunga in June 2018, now known as the Barunga Agreement. The second is to implement a key undertaking made in that memorandum of understanding to make the appointment of the Northern Territory Treaty Commissioner a statutory appointment.

Given the significant potential impact that treaty, or treaties, may have, it is important that we take the time to get this right. To do this, the process of listening to and talking with Aboriginal Territorians needs to be thorough and led by a person who has the trust and respect of Aboriginal Territorians, based on long-standing records of involvement and achievement.

Knowing that drafting and passing legislation takes time and so that this important work was not delayed, Emeritus Professor Mick Dodson AM was engaged as the Northern Territory Treaty Commissioner in March 2019 as a consultant under the auspices of the *Procurement Act 1995*.

One of the key purposes of this bill is to convert Commissioner Dodson's consultancy appointment to a statutory appointment. Clause 23 of this bill achieves this. In order to ensure cultural integrity in his work, one of Commissioner Dodson's first initiatives was to appoint a female Deputy Commissioner. In July 2019, Ms Ursula Raymond was appointed to that role.

This bill specifies the areas around which Commissioner Dodson is required to consult with Aboriginal Territorians. They are detailed in clause 11 as follows:

- a) to gauge support in the Territory for a treaty between the Territory and Aboriginal peoples of the Territory