

25 October 2023

Statement from Queensland Human Rights Commissioner Scott McDougall in response to Queensland Police Union President's comments about the truth and treaty process

In the aftermath of a referendum debate which exposed Queensland's First Nations communities to harmful levels of racist discourse, it is reprehensible to create further harm with such divisive and inflammatory language.

Any movement toward progressive change generates backlash and the Police Union President's comments reported today must be seen for what they are: part of a backlash against Queensland taking steps towards treaty. All this does is divert energy from the real work of change-making and make that process longer, harder, and more divisive than it needs to be.

Less than 12 months ago the independent Commission of Inquiry into the Queensland Police Service responses to domestic and family violence delivered *A Call for Change*, a report that found:

"Racism is a significant problem within the Queensland Police Service. It manifests in discriminatory behaviours directed towards First Nations employees, employees from other cultural backgrounds and members of the community".

Queensland Police Service leadership have accepted these findings and committed to working to address them, recognising change as an organisational necessity if the service is to work effectively with communities across Queensland.

The Police Union President's comments have rightly been condemned by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders, and Queensland must not allow those comments to take away from the real and continuing work to address issues facing First Nations communities.

This work includes confronting our colonial history to understand how to best respond to its continuing legacies. The truth telling inquiry is a vital part of this work and I implore all Queenslanders to embrace the opportunity it provides to come to terms with the past and to build lasting relationships between First Nations people, governments and frontline agencies including police.

I also remind media outlets, commentators, and people making comments in public (including online) spaces to remember that Queensland's Anti-Discrimination Act makes vilification unlawful. First Nations people are protected in Queensland from any public statement that incites hatred, serious contempt or severe ridicule towards them on matters of public interest where the words are delivered in bad faith.

- **ENDS**

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