



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

**NATIONAL APOLOGY TO AUSTRALIA'S
INDIGENOUS PEOPLE**

THURSDAY 13 FEBRUARY 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

AFL from Tiwi—and they are leaders, despite all of that. We have to ask ourselves whether we are moving forward or leaning towards our past; are we repeating the same mistakes all over again?

I thank everyone who contributed.

Mrs ZIO (Fannie Bay): Madam Speaker, today marks the 17th anniversary of the National Apology to the Stolen Generations, a pivotal moment in Australia's history.

On 13 February 2008 the then Prime Minister stood before parliament and delivered an apology to Indigenous Australians, acknowledging the profound grief, suffering and loss inflicted by past government policies. This Apology was not merely a symbolic gesture, but a recognition of the cold, confronting, uncomfortable truth of our nation's past.

The Apology addressed the forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, communities and country. It was a formal acknowledgement of the pain endured by the Stolen Generations, their descendants and the families left behind. As the mother of three children I cannot imagine the pain that those people went through.

Although the Apology was a significant step forward towards reconciliation, as the Member for Arafura said, it was never intended to be the end of the journey. This new chapter was meant to focus on closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity. Seventeen years on we must acknowledge that progress has been slow. The latest Closing the Gap annual report shows that only five of the 19 socioeconomic targets are on track. It is a sobering reality that reminds us all that the work is far from complete.

We must strive for practical solutions that make a tangible difference in the lives of our First Nations people, particularly in the areas of safety, housing, health, education and employment.

I hope that we can use this anniversary as a catalyst for change. Let us work together—Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians alike—to write a new chapter for our nation's history, a chapter based on mutual respect, resolve and responsibility. As we reflect on the past, please let us also look to the future with determination and hope, for it is through our actions, not just our words, that we will create a more just and equitable Australia for us all.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Fannie Bay from whom I always get a lesson about listening more and speaking less. It has been humbling today to listen to everything everyone had to say. I had not planned on saying anything in particular; I have no prepared notes, so we will see how this goes.

I have no specific nexus to this issue or to the Stolen Generations, and I do not want to speak for anyone else. I had the privilege, though, of being in Canberra on the day when the Apology was given. I remember it being an emotionally charged time and issue. I remember people having a range of opinions about whether an apology should be issued, what it meant, what it did not mean and who had the authority to speak on any of the issues.

We all have a right to speak in this place on all these issues. I am grateful for the diversity of voices I have heard tonight. I do not wish to speak for anyone else. I recall clearly that Hon Dr Brendan Nelson was under extraordinary pressure not to support the Apology. It was one of the more stellar moments of his leadership that he could bring together a coalition of the willing to join forces and provide a unified, dignified and respectful position and try to move things forward.

I can honestly say, hand on heart, for what it is worth that I am proud to be part of the government. I believe in the sincerity of all my colleagues on this side of the Chamber. I believe in their commitment to want to make things better for all Territorians and Indigenous Territorians.

Indigenous disadvantage begins with education. People who have represented electorates out in the bush and have a deep and abiding connection to Indigenous communities are entitled to vent frustration at the fact that in the last 17 years we have not managed to progress a range of things we aspired to in that National Apology.

I do not have any answers. I am grateful we had the opportunity to hear from everyone today on these issues. It is only by having open and respectful discussions that we can move the agenda forward.

I did not know the Member for Daly until last December when we were both forced to be at the Scrutiny of Legislation Conference in Victoria, briefly. I got to know him a little as a human being, and he is not a bad bloke. I would like to hear his grandad's story at some point.

I think it is great that everybody could make a contribution today and recognise the anniversary of the Apology.

Madam SPEAKER: I pay my respects to the Stolen Generation of the Northern Territory on this 17th anniversary of the National Apology. I acknowledge the pain and suffering they have experienced, and I wish them peace, love and kindness going forward.

I, too, would love to have heard the story of your grandparents, Member for Daly, because they come from a part of the world that I know well, at the top of the Clarence River. Maybe we can have a cup of tea one day, and you can tell me the story.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I move that the Assembly do now adjourn.

Mr MACKAY (Goyder): Madam Speaker, I raise a deeply concerning incident that occurred within the parliamentary precinct yesterday. On Wednesday 12 February, on a sitting day of the NT parliament, a federal staff member of Senator Malarndirri McCarthy attempted to physically intimidate a Member of the NT Legislative Assembly.

The independence and liberty of all MLAs in this Chamber is of the utmost importance and is essential to the Westminster system. It should be of great concern to all in this Chamber and in the Northern Territory that a staff member for a Cabinet minister in the federal Albanese government attempted to intimidate and harass a member of this Assembly.

All representatives of the people, at all levels of government in Australia, must ensure we uphold a free and democratic society. Why Senator McCarthy's staffer set out to intimidate a Territory MLA is unknown. However, he followed up his physical intimidation with harassment and unfounded accusations.

To the members of the NT Labor Party, I hope you share similar concerns that our NT parliament should be free of intimidation and harassment, especially from federal taxpayer-funded staff.

I hope the Prime Minister takes swift action on the senator's office and the staff member who actively attempted to intimidate a Member of the NT Legislative Assembly and did so on Parliament House grounds on a sitting day of parliament.

Given what has already been widely reported in terms of the behaviour of staff from the Leader of the Opposition in this place, I call on the Leader of the Opposition to speak with her federal ALP colleagues, as a leader of her organisation in the NT, to make clear to her members and supporters that this behaviour is unacceptable and to prevent this sort of action from taking place again.

I make it clear that behaviour of this type is unacceptable, and I will not hesitate to call it out when it takes place. Although I refrain from naming the individual involved at this time or mentioning his personal connections to this place, I have no qualms naming this community member if these actions and behaviour continue in any way.

Mr PATEL (Casuarina): Madam Speaker, I celebrate remarkable individuals and cultural milestones within our Casuarina community—moments that reflect the spirit of service, dedication and multiculturalism that define the Northern Territory.

It is my privilege to recognise Mr Michael Foley OAM, who has been named the 2025 NT Senior Australian of the Year. In many cultures, especially in my culture, elders are revered as pillars of wisdom, strength and compassion. For more than 40 years Michael has embodied these values, ensuring that senior citizens are not only recognised but also celebrated.

In 2014 he founded Seniors of Excellence NT, a platform dedicated to honouring the contributions of elders. Since its inception 183 seniors have received the Seniors of Excellence NT Award highlighting their lifetime of achievements. Michael's dedication extends beyond this initiative. He has given his time and resources to