



Speech By
David Batt

MEMBER FOR BUNDABERG

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MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Mr BATT** (Bundaberg—LNP) (3.09 pm): Mr Speaker, congratulations on your election. I rise to speak for the first time in the 56th Queensland state parliament. I am the 15th member for Bundaberg and only the second member of a conservative political party to have held the seat since it was created in 1888. I am truly grateful and excited to have been given this opportunity to help build a better Bundaberg.

Five generations of my family have called Bundaberg home. I am the youngest of three boys—the Batt boys! We spent our early years living in the Mount Perry Road service station and shop in North Bundaberg that Mum and Dad ran. They made deliveries and worked around the clock. We later moved to Walkervale where Mum and Dad delivered newspapers. It was not uncommon to be woken in the early hours when the wrapping machine broke down or the delivery boys called in sick—bleary-eyed, out of bed and straight into it, all hands on deck to get the papers delivered on time.

Dad was knocked off his motor scooter one day, badly dislocating his hip. It put him out of action for months. It was a hard time for our family, but out of the pain and disappointment Mum and Dad bought 200 acres to run cattle as an income stream for the family. Dad was born on the land not far out of Bundy, so it was a natural fit for him to get back to a place he loved. I loved being there with him—just working beside him, clearing the paddock of basalt boulders by hand to plant pasture, buying and selling cattle and learning how to drive in the little two-man Suzuki ute.

We also spent a lot of time at Kendalls Flats junior cricket grounds where Dad was treasurer. He was instrumental in getting the grounds transformed from an old dump site to an eight-field cricket facility. Our weekends were spent helping maintain the grounds and he was awarded life membership of the Bundaberg Junior Cricket Association and field 8 is named after him—Rod Batt Oval. Despite having never fully recovered from his injuries, Dad has never let any hurdle get in his way. He is the toughest fellow I know. He was not the only positive role model in my life.

My mum, Lyn, made our three-bedroom weatherboard house a home. We lived within earshot of Walkervale State School where I was Walsh house captain. Mum had to contend with her three energetic sons and our mates after school. Ours was a happy childhood. There was never any doubt how much Mum loved us boys. Nothing was ever too much to ask. There was not a season where we did not play sport—Rugby League, cricket and soccer. Mum drove us to every game and cheered us on. My parents have been an unshakable team for more than 50 years. I think my brothers, Paul and Peter, will agree that we do not get warm and cuddly too often as a family, but we have always seen pride in our parents' smiles.

Paul and Peter have both dedicated over 30 years to teaching and the Queensland Ambulance Service. Every time someone asks me if I am related to either of them, I know there is a positive story to come. I will always be grateful to our parents for teaching us persistence, community spirit, loyalty and work ethic. It was not only my family that instilled in me the importance of public service. Like my

Nan, Dad and brothers, I went to Bundaberg State High School where I was a prefect. As a proud Bundy High 'old boy', I still live by the school's motto 'per ardua ad astra', which means 'through hard work, the stars'.

As soon as I turned 15 and was old enough to get a job, I started working part-time at Woolies. I intended to become a PE teacher, but it was not to be. A chance meeting put my life on a different path. After speaking with Sergeant Bubb at a careers night, I applied to join the Queensland police force. Each year there were hundreds of applicants for only 100 cadet positions, so I did not think I stood much of a chance, but I was wrong. I did not want to be a financial burden on my parents, so I deferred my human movements degree and decided to give the police force a go.

As a 17-year-old, the police academy saw some of the best—and worst—days of my life. The instructors constantly challenged the cadets and tried to break us. We depended on each other to get through each day and night with words of encouragement. For the majority of cadets who were so-called 'blue bloods' with family or friends in the job, it was more a rite of passage. For me it was an eye-opening experience. I made lifelong mates, many of whom are still protecting our state and keeping the thin blue line strong some 30 years on, and it is great to have several of them here today. Like me, others have moved on to serve the communities we love in other ways. My A-squad neighbour in 1989, Andrew Antonioli, is now the mayor of Ipswich. I still remember his mum's homemade biscuits. 'Ant' brought us a tin of them each Sunday night to keep us going for another week.

After I graduated from the academy, I worked in uniform and plain clothes for five years in Gladstone and various Brisbane suburbs before moving back to Bundaberg. I became a detective and over 11 years I solved crimes like the Childers backpacker hostel fire and the murder of British backpacker Caroline Stuttle. Working in a major incident room every day for months at a time trying to identify a murderer, followed by protracted court proceedings and appeals, really took its toll.

Having spent many years as the Police Union secretary and a peer support officer, I was now the one needing a break from plain-clothes duties, so I took up the position of branch manager of the Bundaberg Police Citizens Youth Club. Liaising with the community showed me there were other ways to prevent crime rather than just locking up offenders and hoping they would be rehabilitated. I enjoyed bringing organisations together to break down barriers between coppers and kids, teach them some skills and build their self-confidence.

I met the now member for Burnett, Stephen Bennett, through the Sunrise Rotary club breakfast meetings that were held at the PCYC. In 2007 I joined other young professionals on a Rotary group study exchange to Nottingham, England. I was not prepared for how much this life-changing four weeks would open my eyes to the things we could do better in Bundaberg and across the state. Team leader Judith and my travel companions Tanya, Sharee and Peter have become lifelong friends.

I thought I would be a copper until I retired, but out of the study tour I developed a strong desire to see Bundaberg thrive. I stepped out of my comfort zone and nominated for the 2008 local government elections when the state Labor government had forced amalgamations on councils. To my surprise, I won the five-horse race for division 8. It would be remiss of me not to pay tribute to Bundaberg Regional Council's first mayor, Lorraine Pyefinch. Lorraine did an amazing job bringing the four councils together. In my opinion, there are not enough community leaders like Lorraine who are willing to make hard and unpopular decisions for the betterment and longevity of their regions.

In the summer of 2010-11 Bundaberg was hit by its biggest floods in 60 years. After the event I was awarded Rotary's Paul Harris Fellow for my leadership as acting chair of the local disaster management group. In only my second term of council, in 2012 my fellow councillors appointed me deputy mayor. Sadly, in January 2013, just two years after the floods, a collection of disaster events across the region rolled into what can only be described as a perfect storm.

The Burnett River burst its banks and Bundaberg was hit by the biggest flood ever recorded, causing massive destruction to over 2,000 homes, 600 businesses and major community infrastructure. On 29 January, North Bundaberg had the biggest mandatory evacuation in peacetime Australia. Some 7,500 residents were evacuated from their homes. Military and civilian helicopters winched hundreds of people to safety, and not a single life was lost. While the disaster, response and recovery was not without its issues, Bundaberg's response is still used as a case study in disaster management circles right across Australia. It is something everyone involved in should be very proud of.

There are many in my community who continue to struggle financially and emotionally. Some have chosen to rebuild their homes and businesses. Others have made the difficult decision to move on. There are two moments in particular for me as disaster recovery coordinator that will be forever etched in my mind. Breaking the news to hundreds of people that their homes and worldly possessions had been destroyed was one of the hardest things I have ever had to do. Stranded north side residents gathered at the Moncrieff theatre, where I tried as best as I could to prepare them for what they were

going back to. We told them they would be able to return home to begin the colossal clean-up that afternoon but, despite our best efforts to make the area safe, the damage was far worse than we expected. Army officers said it was worse than any war zone they had encountered. The situation was changing by the minute.

People were lined up at the Burnett traffic bridge waiting for us to open the bridge so that they could return home. I ran from the coordination centre to explain that, despite what we had said earlier, it still was not safe to go home. I worked my way through the crowd. Some people cried and most were understandably angry. I was willing to be in their line of fire if it let them get their frustrations off their chest. It was a difficult decision but one the disaster recovery team had to make to keep the community safe. There were craters three metres deep, broken sewerage pipes and fallen powerlines, houses collapsed into sink holes or completely washed away.

I am a firm believer that real leadership means being up-front and honest, no matter how hard it may be. You must be willing to change your mind as the situation calls for it. I have never been someone who tells people what they want to hear simply to make myself look good or to score political points.

That is why David Crisafulli's no-nonsense attitude during the recovery was a breath of fresh air. The now member for Broadwater, who was minister for local government at the time, changed my mind about what state government is capable of. I for one will never forget the commitment he showed to rebuilding Bundaberg well after the floodwaters had subsided and the television cameras had lost interest.

I have always been proud to call Bundaberg home, but it was the Bundy spirit that I saw in the days, weeks and months after the floods that cemented my genuine love for my community. I will never forget those who selflessly rolled up their sleeves to help people they had never met. They worked shoulder to shoulder in the heat, humidity, mud and filth. People from all backgrounds, ranks, levels of government; men, women and even children all just did what needed to be done.

The best way to describe Bundaberg is probably on a plate. Within a 50-kilometre radius of the CBD you will find all the ingredients for a vibrant, colourful and iconic Australian banquet. You start with a Thirsty Turtle beer, followed by a Dark and Stormy with a wedge of lime; sea scallops with a chilli and ginger dressing; eye fillet with a garlic prawn topper and roasted vegetable salad; and finish with a fresh fruit salad or chocolate coated macadamia nuts. People could walk into almost any cafe in the Bundaberg electorate and find locally grown produce on the menu: Alowishus Delicious, Oodies, Indulge, Rosie Blue, Water Street Kitchen, Eleven Acres and Penny Lane Gardens to name just a few.

But Bundaberg is much more than the country's premier food bowl; it is also home to value adding, innovation and entrepreneurship. Manufacturing is alive and well. The mechanical cane harvester and Jabiru aircraft were invented in Bundaberg. Bundaberg's favourite son, Bert Hinkler, built his first glider in Bundaberg. Bin chickens get a bad rap now, but few people know that it was the humble ibis that inspired our great aviator. We gave the world Bundaberg Rum and Bundaberg Ginger Beer. International medical IT companies such as Best Practice Software proudly base their head office where they first began—in Bundaberg. Auswide's head office stands proudly on Barolin Street as a reminder of what my community is capable of doing. Half a century ago Ron Hancock started Auswide as a building society and, today, it is Australia's 10th bank.

The Bundaberg electorate has an impressive story to tell, but it is not without its challenges. Although the cost of living in the Bundaberg electorate is comparatively low, so too are household incomes. The 2016 census shows Bundaberg's median rent is \$260 a week and the median personal weekly income is just \$490. Bundaberg has historically high unemployment and, like much of regional Queensland, has high levels of obesity, disability, substance abuse, domestic violence and crime. If we are to improve social outcomes in the Bundaberg community and prevent another generation being lost to welfare dependence, we need to support our young people.

Of late I have heard a lot from Queensland's political leaders about bullying and the damage it is doing to our youngsters and there is talk of national summits and smartphone bans in schools. But the truth is that it starts with us in this place. We should be setting an example and debating policies, not personalities. Let us keep our debates clean and respectful in this chamber and in the media.

In my electorate, air-conditioning Bundaberg classrooms would give local students a comfortable learning environment, improve their concentration on those hot humid summer afternoons and give them the best start in their education. We need more funding for alternative education programs such as Changemakers and a purpose-built drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre in the Wide Bay-Burnett region. Improving our footpaths and installing flashing lights in all school zones would enable more people to walk or ride to school or work. Bundaberg has the ideal topography and climate, but it needs

the infrastructure that encourages active lifestyles. Whether it is running, walking, pushing a pram, riding a mobility scooter or using a wheelchair, people will be living healthier lives, taking pressure off the health system and easing traffic congestion.

My No. 1 priority for Bundaberg is the delivery of a new category 5 hospital. A hospital planning commission, as proposed by the LNP, would masterplan the new facility, but the current Palaszczuk government intends to carry out another study to determine whether the existing hospital can be renovated. That is simply not good enough! Bundaberg Base Hospital has had numerous facelifts, extensions and add-ons since it was opened in 1914—over 100 years ago. Back then, the people of Bundaberg raised the funds themselves to build the hospital and were so proud of their achievement that the day of the opening was declared a public holiday. The old girl has served the Wide Bay-Burnett region well, but our needs are greater now. Those people who have made the wise choice to retire to beautiful Bundaberg deserve access to quality health care.

Our health staff, who do a fantastic job, deserve a modern well-organised work environment. Patients should not have the stress of being evacuated away from their loved ones when the hospital floods. Whether in opposition or government, I will fight in parliament and in the LNP party room for these and many other important projects. I am not just focused on the current political cycle; I have a long-term vision for my region. Well-planned, significant infrastructure takes time and money. Regional Queensland is the engine room of the state's economy and it deserves its fair share of funding. All Queenslanders, no matter their residential address or social status, should have access to quality health care and education.

I have strong Christian and charitable values, but I firmly believe in giving people a hand up and not a handout. I believe that government policies should reward hard work and not hinder it. That is why in 2016, tired of seeing Bundaberg neglected by various state Labor governments, I decided to join the Liberal National Party. I would like to take this opportunity to thank members of the Bundaberg branch of the LNP who took a leap of faith in me.

I thank Keith Pitt and Paul Neville, the current and former federal members for Hinkler, and the member for Burnett, Stephen Bennett, for guiding me along this journey. I give special thanks to the Bundaberg LNP state electorate committee: Jane Corcoran, Peter Ahern, Kim Brown and Angela Nightingale, who helped me immensely in the lead-up to the campaign. I also thank volunteers Les, Rowan, Steve, Phil, Dean, Bradley, Ben, Rod and many others. Of course, Team Batt coordinator extraordinaire, Anne Howard. Peter O'Beirne, was my right-hand man from sun-up to sundown. Larine Statham, who took time away from her young family to lend her astute political judgement and media expertise.

We ignored repeated calls for us to attack our opponents and maintained our grassroots local campaign focused on building a better Bundaberg. It was a tactic that may not have worked in other parts of the state, but my team and I know our electorate. Bundy people wanted, and deserved, positivity. I was not prepared to change who I am or ignore my personal values to win an election.

Commentators said that One Nation would be kingmakers in the Bundaberg election, but I won the seat on first preferences. Many Bundy voters, including my dad, said that they voted LNP for the first time in their lives. People forget that Bundaberg is traditionally a Labor held seat. I am so very grateful to all of the people who have supported me before, during and since the campaign because they believed in me and wanted to see the LNP win Bundaberg. It is now my turn to work hard to show them that they backed the right candidate.

Most importantly, I thank my family who are here today: my wife, Sharyn, and daughters Taleigha and Maddy. I thank them for letting me follow my heart. While I was working in the Police Service and on the council I missed some special events. I can almost certainly guarantee I will miss a few more in this new role, but know that you mean the world to me. I would also like to thank Ed Sheeran who, by performing at Suncorp Stadium tonight, gave my girls some extra motivation to make the trip down to Brisbane today.

The last time I was in this parliament I was training to be a close personal protection officer for dignitaries and politicians. I have to pinch myself. It is strange to think that this Bundy boy is now on the other side of that fence. When I left local government to take up this seat in state parliament, a ratepayer sent me a heartfelt and greatly appreciated email that said that my authenticity would be missed in the council. I hope my Bundaberg constituents and colleagues will also come to see me as authentic. I understand that being here is a privilege, not a right, so I make this commitment: I will serve the people of Bundaberg with honesty, integrity and compassion for as long as they will have me represent them in state parliament.