



Speech By
Leanne Donaldson

MEMBER FOR BUNDABERG

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MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Ms DONALDSON** (Bundaberg—ALP) (5.18 pm): I would like to place on the record my congratulations to the Speaker on his historical appointment as Speaker of the House. I am honoured to have entered this parliament at the time when he has been elected Speaker and I wish him well. I rise in this House today to first and foremost acknowledge the original owners of the land on which I stand today. I am truly honoured to represent the people of Bundaberg and I acknowledge the responsibility they have placed upon me and the faith they have put in me to represent them.

I acknowledge that not all those who cast their vote in January put me as their first choice. However, my office is always open to all and I will represent all to the best of my ability. I think that is an important point to dwell on for a moment. One of the reasons I put up my hand to represent the people of Bundaberg was to ensure that everyone—and I mean everyone—had a voice in this place, not just the well off, not just the able, not just the lobby groups, not just those who could articulate their issues, not just those who were seen to be worth it, but all people. Too many times I have seen the disenfranchised left without a voice, and I am here to speak up for them.

While it is hard to believe that I have become a member of the 55th Parliament and, as a result, part of an historic turning point for our state—and, I believe, the political landscape of this country—I am up to the task. That task is to ensure that delivering for our community is above politics and that we are beyond reproach. Our community is crying out for politicians who rise above the politics, for representatives who listen to their electors and truly represent their views, for community advocates who are 100 per cent committed to the job at hand and are not thinking of the job interview they will face in three years time.

The electorate of Bundaberg was created by the Electoral Districts Act 1887, which—and I am sure this will be seen as a shame by the Treasurer—abolished the electoral district of Mulgrave, which included the area of Bundaberg at the time. It is well known that Bundaberg has had one of the longest Labor histories of any electorate in Queensland, in most recent times being held by Nita Cunningham, who passed away in February of this year. She represented the Bundaberg region with a vision that will live on, and what a region it is.

Who else in this House gets to represent an area that is at the gateway of the southern Great Barrier Reef—except for the member for Gladstone—and the Mon Repos turtle rookery while having the Bundaberg sugar mill, Bundaberg Brewed Drinks and Bundaberg Rum Distillery as businesses in their electorate? We have aviator Bert Hinkler, Socceroo Clint Bolton, Olympian Steve Goodall, Paralympic medal winner Rheed McCracken, State of Origin coach and league player Mal Meninga, Queenslander of the Year Chris Sarra, cricketer Don Tallon and singer Gladys Moncrieff—just to name a few of our famous sons and daughters.

Bundaberg, however, is much more the richer for those unsung heroes who are at the beating heart of our community. Honourable members would be surprised at the amount of community activity in Bundaberg. They would be hard pressed to walk down the main street and find someone who is not

involved in some type of community activity or volunteerism. Whether it is participating in the Bundaberg Ring Road Run, cutting oranges for the Bingera Soccer Club, directing at the North Bundaberg State High School musical or donating to the Bundaberg Hospital foundation, it is a community that has seen hard times, but it is always there for those who need a hand. This was seen in abundance during our all-too-recent natural disasters. Those who themselves had been affected by flood in 2013 were also those who rolled up their sleeves and helped out their mates and neighbours who were also reeling and trying to come to terms with what happened.

Our region has one of the best climates in the world alongside Hawaii, which is not only great for lifestyle but also for agriculture. While we may be best known for our sugarcane fields and associated milling and refining, since Labor secured water for our region, fruit and vegetable production has boomed. Avocado, banana, bean, blueberries, button squash, capsicum, chili, citrus, cucumber, custard apple, eggplant, honeydew melon, lychee, mango, passionfruit, potato, pumpkin, rockmelon, snow peas, stone fruit, strawberries, sweet corn, sweet potato, tomato, watermelon, zucchini and macadamia nut farming are big business in our region. We like to think we are challenging other areas of the country to become the new food bowl of Australia. Further investment in the industry and value-added businesses are critical to underscoring the future sustainability of our region. Bundy Pride, Bundaberg Region Rising, the local Chamber of Commerce and Business Bundaberg are just some of the local organisations leading the way to highlight and market our fresh produce. For some years there has been a regular display in the parliament of produce from our region. I intend to continue that tradition.

Water is essential for life, but in my electorate it is also the source of heartbreak. The 2010 and 2013 floods are a matter of very public record and were devastating to my friends and community. The weather events including ex-Tropical Cyclone Oswald and tornados that struck the electorate of the member for Burnett on Australia Day 2013 saw over 300 people rescued by helicopter and over 700 rescued by boat at North Bundaberg. Over 1,000 displaced people were airlifted by helicopter from the Oakwood State School on the northern side of Bundaberg to the southern side, and over 7½ thousand people were displaced overall. In the end over 2½ thousand homes and 200 businesses were affected and not all of them have recovered yet.

I must reiterate, though, that what we did see through the tragic event was our community come to the fore. Every local community group sprang into action and new ones were created. As a very practical lot, we even saw a group of volunteers called Undies for Bundy, which received donations of—you guessed it—undies amongst other things from literally the four corners of the globe. Our own mud army, the SES, council volunteers and the Australian armed forces will always have a special place in the heart of those affected by this tragedy. Hardship brings out the best in most of us and almost all in my community. As the water was rising there were people like Ian, who got his boat out and began ferrying people from their inundated homes to safety. He was not asked to do this; he did this out of concern for his fellow north siders. He is just one of the unsung heroes of the flood of 2013 which has etched itself on the psyche of our city.

Although it was two years ago, the wounds for many are still raw. I have made a commitment to developing a 10-year flood mitigation plan and it is one of my highest priorities. I have met with council, local stakeholders and government departments. I will not rest until the report that I committed to as part of my campaign is delivered, the recommendations are considered and a plan with which to move forward is in place. Action must be taken to best mitigate our community from future flood events. While I acknowledge some work has been done, two years is a long time and I am not prepared to waste another minute. The recovery of our community is too important.

Bundaberg has an unacceptably high rate of unemployment, particularly youth unemployment. It is a national travesty. The region's unemployment rate puts it among the worst 20 per cent of areas in Australia. Youth unemployment is even worse, sitting amongst the worst 10 per cent of the country's regions. Employment data shows that 8.5 per cent of the region's population is unemployed while a startling 16.8 per cent of 15- to 24-year-olds are not working. It is time to right that wrong. It is time to invest in young people through training and apprenticeships. It is time to create an environment where jobseekers are encouraged and workers are valued. It is time we stopped losing our young people to Brisbane because of unemployment. When they leave, we lose their enthusiasm, their fresh way of looking at the world and their zest for life.

I am very proud, however, to have a university in my electorate that is passionate about our region's youth and is working with and in the community to partner with schools and businesses to develop courses and opportunities for our school leavers so we do not have to lose them to Brisbane. CQ University is an innovative and inspiring university and I am pleased to have seen firsthand the talent and quality of the teaching staff we have amongst us and their commitment to being part of a tertiary education system that is working hand in hand with our community.

I am also proud to be a member of the Palaszczuk government that is getting on with the job of job creation in Queensland as it relates to my beautiful part of the world. I look forward to working with the Premier in delivering our commitment of returning our vocational training sector to its former glory as an additional resource for jobseekers and employers in Bundaberg. I do fear, however, that in Canberra we have a less than helpful and small-minded attitude towards jobseekers and working people. I hope that, through the turmoil we have seen in the Liberal Party in Canberra, we will see a return to a time when jobseekers and workers were respected as the engine room of our economy.

Prior to my election I spent 20 years working for the state government and non-government sectors. I also worked as a contractor in areas such as child protection, family law, foster care and training. I have seen people at their most desperate, families divided and children caught in the crossfire. I am thankful that we have services in our community like Phoenix House Sexual Assault Service, Bumblebees Therapeutic Preschool and Bushkids, who do an amazing job empowering children and supporting families.

I have seen too many of those less vulnerable in our community fall through the cracks. Governments are not there to give a handout to everyone; however, they are there to ensure that those less fortunate are treated with dignity and respect when times are tough and referred to services that can help them break the cycle of their misfortune. Good government policy can be life changing. I have seen it in action as a public servant, and now as the member for Bundaberg I am honoured to be in a position to influence it. We have seen cuts to vital preventative services that provide essential interventions for those who have fallen on hard times. Cuts to these services ultimately see increased presentations in our hospitals and courts, which is a bigger cost to the state, our families and our community. We need to restore the balance.

One of the key social issues in our state is domestic violence in the community. The importance of *Not now, not ever: putting an end to domestic violence and family violence in Queensland* cannot be understated. Right here in Queensland reported incidents of domestic violence have increased from 58,000 in 2011-12 to 66,000 in 2013-14. That equates to around 180 reports to the Queensland police of domestic violence incidents each and every day. Dame Quentin Bryce said that it is incumbent on each and every one of us to play our part to take a stand against domestic violence, and I intend to take my role seriously. I commend the actions already taken by the Premier and the Minister for Women, the Hon. Shannon Fentiman, to develop a domestic and family violence prevention strategy and to develop women's refuges in Brisbane and Townsville. These immediate steps are just a few on the long road to eliminate domestic and family violence in our communities. This government will be measured by its response, and I look forward to being involved in the implementation of the recommendations. The Bundaberg community, including our local newspaper the *NewsMail*, has been campaigning for an end to domestic violence, and I stand with them.

People like me do not get elected on their own. People like me do not just pick up swings of almost 20 per cent on their own. People like me do not just put their hand up, click their fingers or click their heels and walk into this great place. There are so many to thank, and I know I will miss mentioning every one of them. First and foremost, thank you from the bottom of my heart to all who supported me in my campaign, whether a large or small amount. You know who you are, and I will be forever in your debt. They doorknocked in Avoca, Millbank, Kepnock and Walkervale, held street stalls at Shalom markets, retweeted and 'liked', made sandwiches, attended community meetings and policy development meetings, gave late night advice, tooted the horn and manned the booths during pre-polling and election days. To you all: there is no way I could have done it without you. To Michelle, Jannene, Margaret, Susan, Josie and Bert, Shirley, Tim, Michael, Phil, Maxine, Sally, Judith, Pat and John, Brenda and David, I say thank you.

To the ETU, including Steve List and his band of Not4Sale members and supporters like his pre-poll stalwart Syd Poole, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. There is no doubt that the Bundaberg community has sent a loud message that they do not support the sale of our assets. I have heard that message, and I will stand by you as you stood by me. To Scott Welsh and the QTU, thank you for your rallying of members to make phone calls; to the CFMEU for your contribution and believing that Bundaberg could be won back by Labor; to the QCU for your ongoing activity, support and presence; and also to the QNU for allowing Cheryl to be their life member and president and for helping me out.

I now come to my campaign team, especially Cheryl Dorrn, campaign manager extraordinaire. What can I say? I cannot thank you enough. The sharing of your wisdom, knowledge, experience, connections and patience and unwavering commitment is one of a kind. I am lucky to have you. Alana Tibbitts—the organiser with the most—Jess Tibbitts and Young Labor, Senator Claire Moore, Evan Moorehead and Anthony Chisholm: I appreciate your unwavering support also.

Branch members are not just Labor Party warriors, but each and every one of them are part of our community. Some of them have worked as volunteers for community groups and organisations for half a century or more. They are activists who work each and every day to help make our community a better place. I thank them all sincerely for their advice, dedication and faith in our ability to win back the trust of the residents of Bundaberg.

To the residents of Bundaberg who took the time to raise issues with me during the campaign, I thank you. Those letters, stories and pleas all became a piece of the fabric of our campaign, our policies and the groundswell of support for a different way of engaging and responding to our community. They saw a different way of campaigning in Bundaberg—I believe for the better. An inclusive conversation has begun in our community, and I will continue that for as long as they want me to.

Since my election I have been hard at work meeting with those who have not previously been heard. I have been meeting with young people and hearing stories about their optimism for the future, and I have been standing with workers while the government restores their conditions. But there is much more to do.

To my mum and dad, who have both passed on: I hope I have made you proud. I thank you for both instilling in me the values of social justice that I hold very dear and encouraging me to work hard and to never give up. I would also like to thank my father for his service to Australia in the Korean War and to my mother for instilling in me a love of regional Australia. To my children, Alex, Ashleigh and Isaac: I know I have not always been there for you, especially when on the hustings, but you are always with me. I love you all more than you will ever know. You are my strength.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I understand that here in the House I have been given a huge responsibility to represent the people of Bundaberg and the people of Queensland. I will make the most of this humbling opportunity and never take lightly the trust that has been placed in me. I thank the House.