



Speech By  
**Rob Pyne**

**MEMBER FOR CAIRNS**

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### MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Mr PYNE** (Cairns—ALP) (5.42 pm): Firstly, I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and pay my respects to elders, both past and present. I would also like to thank those who have assisted me in becoming functional in this place. As I am a person with quadriplegia, the Clerk of the Parliament has provided me with reasonable accommodation to allow me to contribute to this parliament on an equal footing with other MPs. That is all people with a disability want: equality of opportunity. When I was elected one question asked was whether I would have extra time to be here when the bells ring. But that was not something that I would request or expect. However, in providing me with a nearby deputy whip's office, what I have been given is reasonable accommodation that allows me equal opportunity to be here in time when the bells ring. For that I am thankful.

Importantly, I want to thank my family for their support. I thank my mother, Marion, my sister, Joann, and, most importantly, my wife, Jenny, and my daughter, Katie, for their love. I also thank my staff, Erenie and Cameron, for essentially being me when I am out of the office, including during my time here. I also thank the Cairns trade union movement, particularly Together, ALP members and all my supporters for their ongoing support.

It is a considerable honour and personally significant moment to be here giving this speech today. Mr Deputy Speaker, with your indulgence I will explain why this is such a poignant event for my family and me. I grew up in a Labor family—a family committed to public service. My father, Tom Pyne, will be unknown to many members, so I will recount his place in history. Dad was born in Babinda, the youngest of five children. He was educated at the McDonnell Creek, Bellenden Ker and Hambledon state schools and lived for a period at Deeral before moving to Edmonton. He married my mother, Marion McKinnon, in 1955 and they had two children, my sister, Joann, and me. Dad worked as a wood machinist for Queensland Railways, the department of public works and for Advanx Tyre and Motor Services before subsequently opening his own small business, a petrol station at Edmonton.

Dad joined the Australian Labor Party at 18 and held a range of roles in the party, including local branch president and secretary, campaign director for several MPs, ultimately being awarded life membership of the party in 1985. He was elected as a councillor for the shire of Mulgrave in 1961 and served continuously, including 16 years as shire chairman, until the shire was merged into the City of Cairns in 1995. Dad then contested the first mayoral election for the new enlarged City of Cairns and easily defeated incumbent Cairns mayor Kevin Byrne. His term as mayor included overseeing the transition to the new council chambers, the new council headquarters and the development of the Esplanade Lagoon on the Cairns foreshore. He retired in 2000, having never lost an election and having served as shire chairman or mayor for 21 consecutive years.

Dad was a prominent member of the Local Government Association of Queensland, becoming a member of the local government executive in 1979 and serving as the president of the LGAQ from 1997 to 2000. Dad passed on in 2011. Dad offered his services to the party as a potential candidate

for Cairns in 1983, but was overlooked for Keith De Lacy, subsequently becoming Keith's campaign manager. It may have taken a while, but if the old man is looking down tonight he may well reflect that, through me, he has reached the only political goal denied to him. In 2008, I was elected to the Cairns Regional Council and was subsequently re-elected in 2012. All being well, at the end of this term my family will have represented people in Cairns in one capacity or another for 50 years without electoral defeat, a family electoral record of which I am duly proud.

Although it is great to be inspired by history, reflection must be brief, as more than ever the modern electorate is concerned about those who can deliver and deliver now. Clearly, at the last election Cairns electors did not feel that the state government was delivering sufficiently, which is why they elected me. It is my intention to deliver for those who put me in this place, including small business people, teachers, nurses and public sector workers. I refer to nurses like Fae Morgan, who is a palliative care nurse. Nurses such as Fae regularly see people dying before their time and families hurting—supporting families faced with the anguish and gut-wrenching pain of losing someone they love and, unfortunately, because of cuts to services, often working to support these people with struggling resources. Nurses are at the coalface of caring for the people we love. They work unsociable hours to the detriment of their own families, missing out on school concerts, family get-togethers and special occasions. Every day nurses care for Queenslanders. Nurses, firies, ambos and all who work unsociable hours deserve to be paid penalty rates. Fae said to me—

Nursing has an ageing workforce. How can we attract more young nurses to care for us? Certainly not by cutting their entitlements! We need to be forward planning and attracting young people towards the health professions by offering appropriate remuneration, conditions and most importantly, our respect.

I also represent teachers such as Stephen Lippingwell, who teaches at Woree State High School. Educators in the Far North and in my electorate of Cairns are presented with unique challenges owing to the cultural composition of their school communities. Stephen says—

I am passionate about increasing the engagement of all cultural groups in education, especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait and Pacific Islander students. I understand that different culturally appropriate educational approaches are essential to engage all students in education. Others need to recognise this.

I support educators such as Stephen Lippingwell, who are developing culturally differentiated pedagogical approaches to foster connectedness to the school community and increase the engagement and success in the education of Indigenous and Pacific Islander students.

I also represent small business; people like Rob Rutten. Rob runs a small business called Rutten Technologies. As a small business owner who has worked with hundreds of small businesses in Cairns over the last 13 years, Rob understands that good economic management and consistent government underpins private sector growth. But he tells me that is not enough anymore. Rob is part of a growing tide of small businesses who demand to see community focused outcomes and a fair go for all. He says—

It is about more than the simple bottom line of a profit and loss. Modern business owners are not ruthless profit chasers. It's not all about "show me the money" for me, it is about how small business can thrive and contribute to a better place to live for our families and friends of today and our children into the future.

Sonya Barber, a former TAFE teacher now employed by Fitness Australia, has endured the despair of recent years. Sonya said to me—

Having been part of the fight to defend TAFE, please don't forget about our teachers and students. You were there for us, including when we went on strike for the first time in 20 years.

She said—

Also remember the health agenda. Preventative health programs that have wide-reaching impact on social and community connectedness. We spend less than two per cent nationally on health promotion and real programs. It needs to be more to have an impact on chronic disease.

It is indeed my hope that the Palaszczuk government will deliver for these and other Cairns people who have been missing out for a number of years. I hope to see this happen through the delivery of a number of important projects by executive government and also through the work of the Legislative Assembly. I will outline just some of the projects I feel are important for Cairns. The Martyn Street Sporting Reserve Redevelopment is a very important initiative, especially for netball. One of my first actions following the election was to confirm this funding had been secured. Along with Cairns Netball I am keen to see work on the redevelopment of the Martyn Street site begin later this year. This will benefit Cairns and neighbouring electorates. Another important project is the Cairns State High School High Performance Centre. Cairns State High School has identified a long-standing need for an undercover sporting facility. Plans were drawn up by the Bligh government, construction was promised by the Newman government and now it is time to deliver. I have met with the Cairns State

High School principal and her leadership team and promised my support for this project. I have written to Minister Kate Jones and will continue to lobby hard for this much-needed project that would see valuable school land used for the benefit of not just the school but also the wider community.

Another important project is the Synapse Rehabilitation Centre in Hoare Street. I have long been working with the Synapse Brain Injury Association to plan and construct a rehabilitation facility for people in Cairns who sustain an ABI. I am confident that there will be a rehabilitation centre operational in Cairns during this term of government. Primarily aimed at Indigenous people with an ABI, this facility will provide a pathway and life opportunities for some of our most disadvantaged Queenslanders.

Cairns needs a base for our special education specialists and facilities for students with very high needs. This must be done in an inclusive education environment that fosters socialisation and wellbeing. Land has been identified and parents of some of our high-needs students are already being consulted. They are looking forward to the same facilities for their children as are provided in other regional cities of similar size.

Another project is the Shields Street Heart project. Cairns Regional Council wants to make our CBD streets welcoming and beautiful—cool and shady in the daytime and festive and lively at night. The Shields Street Heart project focuses on creating a new and refreshed public space from Abbott Street to Grafton Street, providing more cool, vibrant and tropical streetscaping for our city heart. Plans have been developed following community feedback. The Bligh government committed \$38 million to CBD renewal in Cairns. Work subsequently commenced with the upgrade of Lake Street completed in 2014. However, the Newman government only allocated a fraction of the Bligh commitment. With work on the Shields Street Heart to start this year, I expect our current government, the Palaszczuk government, to make a contribution.

The Step Up Step Down unit proposed for Law Street in Cairns will offer short-term residential treatment in a purpose-built facility delivered by mental health specialists in partnership with non-government organisations. The units in this centre will be occupied by young people who are at increased risk of an acute episode of mental illness. A young person experiencing this situation will have the much-needed supports which will then be subsequently withdrawn as mental health improves and the young person transitions back into the community. This will be a six-bed facility with the capacity to expand the number of beds to 12 in future years. Targeted at 18- to 25-year-olds, this project offers a best-practice response to people experiencing mental illness focused on community care and integration. The project follows the tragic loss of a number of young Cairns lives to suicide in recent years. The project is funded but has not commenced construction as the land remains registered in the name of Queensland Rail. I have seen much bureaucratic bungling over the years from both sides of politics, but I am confident Minister Cameron Dick will resolve this and ensure the land will be transferred and the construction of this much-needed facility will commence in the not-too-distant future.

A commitment to public or social housing is another key reason I support the Australian Labor Party. During this term of government I am confident we will see a number of public housing developments completed in Cairns. The total cost will be several million dollars and many families will be housed. This is exactly the sort of thing Queenslanders have a right to expect from a Labor government.

Cairns residents have long lacked the recreational fishing facilities of other cities. I am working to have the Tingira Street boat ramp upgraded. This would provide a safe and accessible way for local boaties to enjoy the recreational opportunities of Trinity Inlet and surrounding areas. Another important project is the Global Village project. The impact arts, culture, heritage and our creative industries have been extremely important in Cairns, ensuring a vibrant, liveable community inclusive of the many migrant communities that have established their lives here in our region far from Brisbane's centralised services. More importantly, the arts and cultural communities have a unique way of engaging with domestic and international tourists, our region's most dominant industry. I recently met with key members of the arts and multicultural communities who outlined the extent of the decline in the Far North Queensland region's arts services and cultural support infrastructure over recent years. They also outlined how this poses an opportunity to go forward and address this deficit with strategic solutions that capitalise and expand on existing programs. This is a unique opportunity and three significant community based organisations have offered to pool their skills and resources into a shared service model that would deliver services on a range of current state government policy areas including the arts, event management, science and technology, tourism, education,

employment and crime prevention. The proposal is to co-locate three community-based NGOs: Arts Nexus, which is an arts and cultural development service for the creative industries; Cairns Community Radio, which is an ethnic and community broadcasting service; and Cairns and Region Multicultural Association. These three organisations each have proven track records, active memberships and are best placed to facilitate community conversations on cultural facilities and other community issues.

As well as these specific projects, Cairns desperately needs to position itself to generate the jobs of the future. Jobs in health, education and tropical sciences are part of a bright future in jobs growth. My vision for Cairns is that of a city that will fulfil its potential by making the most of its environment and geographical location as a Pacific rim city. Cairns will embrace its cultural diversity and firmly establish itself as a world leader in health and education and as the home of tropical excellence in business, sport and the arts. This shall be achieved by fostering innovation and embracing emerging technologies.

I have tried to steer away from controversy in this my first speech, and I close on a subject that I believe is the most important faced by this parliament and which, were it not for the intellectual poverty of recent years, would indeed be beyond controversy. The issue of which I speak is the issue of climate change.

Climate change is a scientific fact. It is leading to sea-level rise and Cairns is a low-lying city. Every year I do my best to attend a king tide on the Cairns Esplanade. I see the esplanade seawall breached and I see water coming up through the stormwater drains and flooding underground carparks. This is an urgent situation and we need a sense of urgency from all our elected leaders. I have the utmost respect for those working in disaster recovery, but the reality is that a summer king tide combined with a category 5 cyclone would see much of Cairns city destroyed. All levels of government need to first acknowledge the problem and then make sure our best scientific minds feed into an all-of-government policy response. I pray this will happen.