




Speech By
Jason Hunt

MEMBER FOR CALOUNDRA

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INAUGURAL SPEECH

 **Mr HUNT** (Caloundra—ALP) (12.37 pm): I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today and I pay my respects to their elders past and present. Mr Speaker, I congratulate you on your re-election to the high office of Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and for being the first Speaker to serve for consecutive terms in nearly two decades.

At the outset I congratulate the Premier on being re-elected to lead a Labor government for a third term but also her efforts during this global COVID-19 pandemic. The Premier has set the bar very high in terms of redefining leadership in Queensland. To the Premier I say congratulations on her leadership and sacrifice during this time. She has done an amazing job at running our state during the COVID-19 crisis. On behalf of the residents of the Caloundra electorate, I offer a very heartfelt thank you.

I offer my congratulations to all new members elected at the last election, in particular my new colleagues in the Labor caucus, for successfully forming government in the 57th Parliament of Queensland. I look forward to working with all of you.

It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the former member for Caloundra, Mr Mark McArdle, who served the electorate for 16 years. He has a well-earned reputation in the region for being a caring and decent man. Every conversation I have had with Mark has always been instructive, and his cheeky sense of humour meant that every campaign I ran against Mark was very civilised and good natured. I recall going into his electorate office in 2014 to introduce myself as the preselected Labor candidate. As I was leaving, Mark's parting remark was, 'Good luck, but not too much.'

Caloundra is my home town and I love it deeply. The original custodians of the land, the Gubbi Gubbi people, lived and thrived in the region for many thousands of years prior to the arrival of Europeans. The evidence of their continued and unbroken connection with the country is there to be found. In its early days around the turn of last century, Caloundra was considered remote. To connect to the state capital required 100 kilometres of rail network from Landsborough to Brisbane and then 24 kilometres of very bad road from Landsborough to Caloundra. This leg of the journey was via a twice-weekly coach for the princely sum of five shillings.

According to the *Post Office Directory* of 1920, only 15 families lived in Caloundra on a permanent basis. We have grown somewhat since then. It is estimated that nearly 49,000 residents live in the district today, a far cry from the original 15 permanent families. While we have grown in size, we have also grown in charm. Caloundra is one of the most idyllic regions in Queensland, as evidenced by the huge number of people who make their way to the region each and every weekend and every school holidays. Indeed, it is scarcely possible to tell someone you are from Caloundra without receiving the reply, 'Oh, I love Caloundra. We used to holiday there when I was a kid,' or 'Oh, I love Caloundra. We go there every year,' to which I would say, 'And why would you not?'

Caloundra is a bright, happy, vibrant community blessed with picturesque beaches and charged with looking after the northern end of the Pumicestone Passage, a waterway so beautiful and rare that it was recognised under the Ramsar convention in 1993. It is an extremely rare doubled-ended estuary

that is home to 43 species of migratory birds, over 60 fish species, seven species of vital mangroves and also turtles and dugongs at its southern end. It is beautiful, an integral part of growing up in Caloundra and, most importantly, in our care. While local community groups such as TAPP and Night Eyes do excellent work in caring for and promoting the passage, in truth the responsibility falls to all of us here in this House. I pledge that I will do my utmost to protect and nurture the Pumicestone Passage and to put in place any measure that I can so that future generations can enjoy the leisure time and the ecological diversity it provides.

The electorate of Caloundra is a place that builds lifelong memories. As a boy I caught my first fish off Military Jetty at Golden Beach. Last year my son Liam caught his first fish off Military Jetty. Caloundra is that sort of place. Generations of people raised there almost always seek to raise their own family there. Locals will remember, as I do, when Currimundi Road was red dirt, when Bulcock Street had diving boards complete with razor sharp oyster shells on the pylons and when the circus was able to set up on the huge sandbank just in front of Happy Valley. But it is not just a coastal community. The hinterland towns of Landsborough and Beerwah are the windows to the region's more agrarian past and, while both towns still have their roots in that foundation of agriculture, both are now growing into their own easily identified communities. Landsborough is not just a vital transport hub for road and rail; it is also a link to the early European history of the region—a proud, sincere and uncomplicated community for families of all ages.

Beerwah is a town that sticks in my mind as the place where mum used to go to get fresh eggs. It is now a thriving and rapidly growing community with some of the most modern, attractive and peaceful housing developments on the entire coast. During my campaigning, doorknocking in Beerwah was a joy because the estates in the town are so consistently beautiful and well maintained. As I mentioned, the area is growing fast. Imprinting itself onto the traditional region is the area known as Aura, encompassing the new suburbs of Baringa and now Nirimba. These communities are filled with young and vibrant families and are places where young couples just starting out can find affordable housing to enable them to get a foothold and an entry into the magnificent lifestyle that the residents of Caloundra can enjoy—a lifestyle that it will be my job to enhance and grow. It is an area that, thanks to this government, has seen three brand new, state-of-the-art schools started in three years—an area that will see firsthand the benefits of the much anticipated Bells Creek Arterial Road. This is a road that the Premier started in October this year and that promises to unlock jobs, commercial infrastructure, emergency services precincts and traffic-easing alternatives for the residents of Caloundra and Caloundra South. This is my vision for the region—not some radical change of direction but, rather, a vision to protect and preserve the lifestyles that we cherish so dearly; a vision to improve the community by looking after our environment and by bolstering and supporting our educational facilities; a vision that demonstrates how hard work can deliver outcomes—real, solid, tangible outcomes—that will make a material difference to our region.

I will approach this task with the skills and values that I have acquired through various jobs and experiences and with examples set by key people and institutions I have admired and looked to for guidance along the way. My service in the Australian Regular Army has left me with a deep and abiding affection for our service men and women. Our veterans of all ages deserve our respect, a respect that is without question. I know firsthand that serving in our defence forces instils an innate sense of character. These are traits that are useful in everyday life: a love of duty, a calling to service, to serve others without the expectation of reciprocity, and a love of our great nation. This should not be an unthinking, unconditional love; it must be a devotion and a realisation of how incredibly lucky we are to live in the great state of Queensland and this great nation of Australia.

My time in the 2nd/14th Light Horse Regiment offered me the opportunity to meet some of the finest leaders I have had the pleasure of knowing—leaders like my old squadron Sergeant Major Warrant Officer Jack Price, a man for whom leadership seemed to come effortlessly, a man who taught me that leadership was undermined by those who abuse their power and leadership was enhanced by those who walk the road between affection for those they served and respect for the mission that had to be achieved. Another important influence in my development was John Baxter, my former regimental sergeant major. John Baxter is a man so utterly gifted in the craft of leadership that a mere look could instil either terror or a feeling of invincibility in the soldiers under his charge. John taught me that leading by example was the way to get the best out of others.

My time in the military, however, was but a precursor to the most transformative period of my life. For more than two decades I worked as a custodial correctional officer in the state's largest high-security jail at Woodford. I was a 'screw'. But to simply call us 'guards' would utterly disrespect the enormous depth of responsibility that we were called upon to undertake. It would not recognise the danger that we faced. I—we custodial correctional officers—did not simply stand outside a room and guard it. On many occasions we were quite literally locked in a room with some of society's most violent and dangerous criminals. Queensland's prison officers start every day by walking into the lion's den. A new

officer will march into a centre with barely 10 weeks training, and from day one they will be one of two or perhaps a trio of officers who are locked inside a high-security unit of 50 to 90 prisoners, none of whom are favourably disposed towards the staff.

Correctional officers spend almost half their weekends of every year away from their families and work 12-hour nights that require us to be outside for lengthy periods of time—rain, hail or shine—without any designated rest breaks. We respond to scenes of murder, horrific assaults and some of the most graphic and disturbing self-harm episodes it is possible to imagine. Queensland Corrective Services officers do so with a level of pride and integrity that must be seen to be believed.

One of my former colleagues was assaulted so badly in 2018 that, had the assault continued for even a few moments longer, he would most certainly have died. His skull is now held together by 68 titanium screws and 12 steel plates. To this day he has not recovered from his injuries physically or psychologically, but his workmates were back on duty 48 hours later because that is what custodial officers do. They push on when facing the threat of serious assault. They lean on each other for support in and out of work and, in truth, they are extraordinary men and women doing an amazing job. They need our help and they need our support and they need to be protected by those who would privatise their workplace.

This government is to be commended for its efforts in renationalising the state's two private jails. This is and will be a very real improvement in staff safety for the officers at both centres. We are obligated to respect the risk they undertake and acknowledge it often and publicly. Being a custodial officer at Woodford led me to becoming a union delegate for these men and women for 19 of my 21 years—a position that greatly strengthened my pre-existing belief in the absolute necessity in the work of labour movements and unions everywhere. It saddens me that some people still cannot understand the role of unions and the objectives of the ordinary mums and dads who voluntarily make up their numbers. To borrow from Ben Chifley's penultimate address on the subject, the movement is not about putting an extra sixpence into somebody's pocket but is about bringing something better to the people—better standards of living and greater happiness to the greater mass of people.

In my experience staff safety was the primary concern of my own union, Together, and while that did sometimes involve some relatively lively and robust disputes it was largely handled by the disagreeing parties sitting down and laboriously working through an issue until, through constructive collaboration, a decision was made. Intelligence, patience and a very deep sense of caring are the hallmarks of good unionists—qualities that are exhibited every day by some of the officials and organisers that I have known for many years, men and women like Alex Scott, Kate Flanders, Michael Thomas, Darren Roach and the late Sean O'Grady. I thank them for their support and guidance over the last two decades.

To stand in this place—in this House—is a great honour and there are so many people who are responsible for my being here. I must thank the people of Caloundra for letting me be the current custodian of the title 'member for Caloundra'. I must thank ALP State Secretary Julie-Ann Campbell and Jeanette Temperley from party office and the members of the Caloundra branch of the ALP who worked themselves to exhaustion week after week, year after year in what was a six-year marathon to get to this point. I thank the members of the Caloundra branch executive—Michael Hallam, Val Simpson, Karen Moran, Jennifer Witham, Andrew Moran, Charli Fouhy and Dan Bessell—for your unceasing support, encouragement and belief, especially at times when my belief was challenged and flagging.

My family—this is the tricky bit—has been an amazing support to me. I thank my brothers Christian, Shaun and Tim and Auntie Dos and Uncle Adam for their love and for keeping me grounded over these last 50 years. I would be stating the obvious if I said I would not be where I am today without my parents. I wish my mother and father, Jean and Ed, could have been here today. I think they would have liked it very much. My heartfelt thanks goes to my wife, Justine, and my son, Liam, for their soul-nurturing love and their understanding of all the times I have missed and will miss. I look forward to the hugs and kisses when I walk in the door and I am so grateful for the unparalleled joy of being husband and father to both of them.

There is no doubt that 2020 has been a year like no other for so many reasons. For me it will always be the year that persistence paid off, a year that the people of Caloundra gave me the opportunity to serve. To be part of the first four-year fixed term in Queensland affords all of us a place in history and a chance to do amazing things on behalf of the people we represent. I have no doubt that we will look back on our time in the 57th Parliament and say that it was productive and that Queensland was a better place as a result. Mr Speaker, I commend this to you. Thank you.