



Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

Record of Proceedings, 26 March 2015

MOTION OF CONFIDENCE

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (3.18 pm): I stand here today a very humble man. I am honoured to be the new member for Gregory. I confirm my allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and her representative, His Excellency the Governor, Paul de Jersey, and my loyalty to this parliament and to the electors of Gregory.

I acknowledge the Governor's address on the opening of our parliament yesterday, and I sincerely congratulate Mr Speaker on his appointment to the high and respected office of Speaker of this House. Madam Deputy Speaker Grace, I congratulate you on your appointment as Deputy Speaker.

I acknowledge and congratulate Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk, Deputy Premier Jackie Trad and ministers. I also acknowledge and congratulate our opposition leader, Lawrence Springborg, our deputy opposition leader, John-Paul Langbroek, and shadow ministers.

It has been 25 years since the last maiden speech by the member for Gregory was made in this parliament. Of course, that was delivered by a close friend and colleague to many in this parliament, from members to staff: Vaughan Johnson.

Vaughan was well liked in this House by all sides of politics and throughout this great state. He is a man of integrity, honesty and a man who had endeared himself to many. He has been a part of my life as well. Vaughan has been a man of inspiration, guidance and a mentor and someone who stood side by side with me during the last election. I sincerely thank him for everything that he has done for me and I am truly indebted to him. I am blessed to have Vaughan's electorate staff in Longreach and in Emerald—Nikki Heslin, Laura Nolan and Larissa Burnett—staying on with me as the new member. I am so truly lucky to have such wonderful, experienced staff to guide me as the new member for Gregory. They have allowed me to hit the ground running and have made the transition smooth and seamless and I look forward to working with Nikki, Laura and Larissa for a long time.

I want to thank the people of Gregory for placing their confidence in me to be their representative in this great parliament. I am truly humbled by that opportunity. I owe my place in this great parliament as well to the hardworking members of the LNP in the Gregory electorate who on 30 November last year selected me as their candidate for the 2015 election. I went through the preselection with four fine, upstanding gentlemen—Sean Dillon, Andrew Martin, Gary Peoples and Jack Piggott. Any one of them would have been a fine member of parliament for the seat of Gregory. I thank them for getting behind me after the preselection to help me with my campaign. I make special mention of Sean Dillon, a young cattleman from the north of Alpha. After the preselection he, like other preselection candidates, got right behind me, but Sean also spent the whole campaign beside me. Sean left his wonderful and very capable wife and young children and family to manage the cattle operation at Alpha and came and stood beside me to campaign. I am truly indebted to him and he has become a great mate. I need to acknowledge the wonderful efforts made by Mike Burns and Lenore

Johnston, both campaign managers for Vaughan Johnson, who continued their mammoth effort and jumped on board with me—two truly wonderful people. Both Mike and Lenore continue to play key roles in helping me as the member for Gregory. I also want to mention Sonia Burton who ran my campaign office—a beautiful, kind woman who put her life on hold during the campaign to help us retain the seat of Gregory. I also need to thank Sonia's husband, Guy. Sonia and Guy are both hands on and busy running their cattle operation near Emerald and Guy was left without his key asset—his wife—helping him on the farm while on the campaign.

There are so many people to thank for helping me throughout the campaign. To each and every one who helped—whether it be handing out my how-to-vote cards, helping with signage, helping just with morale—my sincere gratitude. I make special mention of my appreciation to the following people in the west of my electorate: of course many here would know Rosemary and Warwick Champion; Peter and Sue Webley; Dom Burden; Brett Walsh; John and Joanne Milne; and Sonia and Peter Doyle. On the eastern side it was Sue and John Engwicht, Arthur and Niree Goodwin, Jeanette Bunting, Helen Quinn, Ian Williams, Eric Bowyer and Audrey Fluerty. My family has played a major role in my life and also in my election to the seat of Gregory. To my beautiful wife of 16 years, Peta, who is here with me today with my three beautiful children, Lucy, Ellie and Poppy: thank you for everything you have done and I love you very much.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

Mr MILLAR: Like many in this parliament, I have been blessed with a wonderful partner and beautiful children. My wife has been beside me through this and, like so many other things over the last 16 years of marriage, she did not blink an eye when I said I was standing for preselection and stood by me through this. I truly love her and the children for everything that they have done.

To my parents Cameron and Joan Millar, who stood beside me as I took this journey, thank you so much. Dad, thank you for running around with me in the ute putting up signs in 40-degree heat in Emerald. It is a really great way to spend some time with your dad, so I would encourage people to do that. To Dougall and Hamish, my brothers, for your support not only through this but throughout my life, I am truly grateful. Whether it was coming back on the farm or as an ABC Rural reporter or now in politics, they have always stood beside me and I am very lucky to have that. I also want to acknowledge three matriarchs in my life who are no longer with us. The first is my mother Carol Millar, whom I love and who was very proud for me to commit to politics, and to my grandmothers, Grandma Peggy Millar and Nan Jo Lucas. All played a significant role in my upbringing.

As a son of a farmer and a grandson, a great-grandson and a great-great-grandson of graziers throughout Queensland, agriculture and regional Queensland have been my whole life. From farming to contract harvesting to my career as an ABC Rural reporter, I have always believed that my life belonged to agriculture and representing the bush. I am a proud supporter of it, it is a major economic contributor to this state and it is a major employer.

The seat of Gregory is the second largest in the state covering a massive 330,000 square kilometres—from Haddon Corner on the South Australian border and then in a north-east sweep all the way past Daringa, which is just 100 kilometres west of Rockhampton. The famous poet Dorothea Mackellar would sum up the electorate perfectly—

I love a sunburnt country,
A land of sweeping plains,
Of ragged mountain ranges,
Of droughts and flooding rains.

The towns and the communities in the electorate of Gregory include Quilpie, Windorah and Jundah in the south-west; Blackall, Tambo, Isisford, Yaraka and Ilfracombe; and Longreach, Barcaldine, Jericho and Alpha in the central west. We then move east to the Central Highlands with the Willows and the gemfields, including Rubyvale, Sapphire and Anakie. We then have Emerald and then to the south of Emerald we have Springsure and Rolleston and then to the north of Emerald we have Capella, Teri and Clermont and then we have to the east Comet, Blackwater, Bluff, Dingo, Woorabinda and Daringa. I make special mention of Woorabinda. It is the Aboriginal council community in my electorate, and it does a fantastic job. It had a good friend in Vaughan Johnson—a fantastic friend in Vaughan Johnson—and I hope to do the same as Vaughan has done to Woorabinda. They are good people and all they want is a fair go, and I promise to represent them well.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

Mr MILLAR: As members would realise, Gregory is a very diverse and very large electorate. Some of the longer serving members would know the kilometres covered by the former member, Vaughan Johnson. In fact, his Toyota LandCruiser has some key accessories not normally found on a normal car. First of all, you have to have a huge bullbar—one of those ones that wraps right around the car. Secondly, you have to have spotlights that would light up the world at night, and there are lots of spotlights. You would also need an Engel fridge in the back so you can have some sandwiches for lunch in case you do not get to the place that you need to get to in time, always have a swag and always, always have two spare tyres because if you get a flat on some of those roads—even if you get two—you will get home, but if you get three flat tyres on your trip you could be in trouble and possibly hundreds of kilometres from anywhere for help. You are certainly out in the back country.

The electorate of Gregory is a wealth creation region for the state's economy. From the vast Mitchell grass plains, gidgee and mulga country in the west producing this state's best cattle and beef and wool and sheep production to some of the best grazing and agricultural prime farming land of the Central Highlands producing cattle, beef, cotton, grain and horticulture, it is really the salad bowl of Queensland. The electorate is also home to the Bowen Basin, the resource rich mining region for this state, and hopefully soon to be a mining region for the Galilee Basin—a major employer for this state that provides plenty of royalties that this state receives. Gregory is also home to what I believe is one of Queensland tourism's jewels in the crown—outback tourism. I believe it starts in the Central Highlands with the mighty Carnarvon Gorge—where I have been plenty of times—and the Blackdown Tableland then stretching through the gemfields and then on to the west of the electorate which includes the Tree of Knowledge and the Australian Workers Heritage Centre, which those on my right would be very familiar with, the Blackall Woolscour and of course the Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame, the Qantas Founders Museum and the Thomson River.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr MILLAR: I look forward to the Minister for Tourism coming out there and I would be more than happy to show her around. There is also the back country in the south such as Quilpie, Windorah and Jundah, and of course Quilpie is looking forward to taking advantage of its dinosaur trail like Winton has and is looking at infrastructure to make it a tourism spot such as a conference centre. I think that that is well worthwhile, so I will be advocating on its behalf as well.

There are many issues that impact the electorate of Gregory that I would like to touch on in my maiden speech, but I believe time will be against me. Drought has ravaged the west for nearly three years. That is three years without a wet season. It has devastated local towns and communities such as Longreach, Ilfracombe, Isisford and Yaraka, down to Blackall, then back up to Barcaldine, then to Aramac and across to Murrumbidgee. It has also hit hard in the south-west at Quilpie, Windorah and Jundah. The drought is hurting not only local graziers but also small businesses—from the local bakery and pharmacy to the auto-electrician, mechanic and the list goes on. Drought funding from the state government was started under the former minister for agriculture, John McVeigh—a good friend—and he has been very passionate about drought assistance since December 2012 when we went to Georgetown. That money for the drought has been well received. The new Minister for Agriculture has spoken to me about it and he is supporting the drought funding as well, especially the water infrastructure rebate, which has gone down well. But I believe that we are now facing a natural disaster. It is a slow, creeping natural disaster that has crept up on us over the past three years.

There has been a massive downturn in local economies that needs to be recognised by all levels of government. People are hurting and we need to do something urgently to keep those people in these towns. Nothing has changed since Prime Minister Tony Abbott's listening tour to Longreach well over a year ago, except that small businesses in these towns are now facing a hard time similar to that experienced by the surrounding graziers. The current situation warrants a roundtable meeting of federal, state and local governments to come up with some more solutions, because if we keep these graziers and small business people in these towns while they are going through this drought, once the season breaks we will get that back from them tenfold through keeping jobs in those local communities, through keeping teachers in those local communities and through keeping police officers in those local communities. Also, they will be paying their taxes. If we help these graziers and these small businesses now through this tough time they will be there for us when the season turns around and they will stick with us.

As I mentioned, the seat of Gregory is home to the state's best farming land—the Central Highlands where I come from—the Emerald irrigation area and an area they call the golden triangle, which stretches from Emerald down to Springsure across to Rolleston and back up to Comet. This land needs to be protected, because this country is one of the region's best assets—farming land that will be needed as we target the high-end premium markets in Asia, from cotton to horticulture, to grains, to pulses, to cattle on feed. The farming sector and the resources sector have to coexist. Both

are vitally important to my electorate and to the region's economy. They both provide most of the jobs in the electorate of Gregory. Right now, with the downturn in the resources sector, local towns such as Emerald, Blackwater, Capella, Tieri and Clermont are hurting. The low price of coal and mining companies laying off workers over the past year has had a huge impact on the local economy. We need to protect our valuable farming land, because when mining is down agriculture provides the economic baseline that keeps our economy out there going.

Before I finish my maiden speech I would like to leave this chamber with some last words from the former member for Burdekin, Rosemary Menkens, whom many members here know. On 27 November last year I had the privilege to personally hear in this House Rosemary Menkens make her valedictory speech. I hope I can live my time in this chamber by what Rosemary said—

Respect is earned, honesty is appreciated, trust is gained and loyalty is always returned.

Thank you.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!