



Speech By
Michael Healy

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

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MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Mr HEALY** (Cairns—ALP) (3.42 pm): I would like to begin by offering my congratulations to all honourable members of this House on their election and re-election into this chamber, and to you, Mr Speaker, on your appointment to high office, which was so well deserved. Today I stand in this chamber humbled by the faith the majority of voters in Cairns have shown in me and the Labor Party. I stand here with great pride as the 17th elected member for Cairns. I am conscious of the legacy I have inherited from the one woman and 15 men who have come before me and I intend to contribute to their legacy, ensuring strong representation for the people of Cairns in this chamber with their best interests as my compass, whilst pledging my loyalty to the institutions of government.

I would like to acknowledge all those who have contributed to my being here today—my wonderful and strong socially minded parents, John and Virginia, my brothers, John and Paul, and my sister, Jane, who have all made indelible but positive impacts on my life. My parents came from working-class backgrounds in the inner Sydney suburbs of Erskineville and Darlington. They made us acutely aware that giving back to our community, along with a healthy respect of others and a love of hard work, were important qualities to maintain. We were taught that we will be judged as a society on the manner in which we look after our most needy, and we were also taught the difference between need and want.

Living on Sydney's North Shore, we were very active in a number of social areas—the Catholic Church, St Vincent de Paul and the Matthew Talbot Hostel, where we all contributed in different ways. I enjoyed a number of years in the surf lifesaving movement and I also contributed as a volunteer in the bushfire brigade.

My father's contribution to youth and sport was fundamental in our lives—apart from his commercial interests—and he was acknowledged some years ago by being appointed the Order of Australia for his contribution to the community. My mother, very appropriate on this day, was a driving force in my life, making us aware of the importance of sacrifice and respect. She also understood the power that comes from compassion and understanding, which are too often qualities mistaken for weakness in this day and age. We were provided with excellent educational opportunities and, fortunately, just as good sporting ones. My appreciation of self-respect, commitment and hard work all developed for me from the sporting field. That is why I am so passionate about sport and the ability it has to positively impact on young people.

To my extraordinary wife, Trudi, you are my best friend, my greatest source of strength and my anchor. None of this would have been possible without you. To our exquisite children, Zoe, 13, and Jack, 10, my love for you is incalculable and boundless. Whilst our bike rides and trips to the reef may be a little less these days, I look forward to instilling in you both the strong social conscience which my parents implanted in me. To my tolerant in-laws, Bobbie and Angelo, and our extended families, I give my thanks and my huge appreciation. The same applies to my close personal friends. You have all contributed in many different ways to me standing here today, and for that I am enormously thankful.

I want to thank those local branch members who did so much, as well as the many others who are not politically aligned but who recognised the need for change. I want to thank my colleagues from the tourism industry who made significant contributions to our campaign in a number of different ways. I thank those who volunteered at stalls and booths in the months prior to the election and those who contributed to our phone banking and doorknocking. I want to thank those particularly who made financial contributions.

To the scrutineers and my family and good friends who worked on election day, to my colleagues from the union movement who stood out in that hot Cairns sun and made such a wonderful contribution, my success was their success. To my campaign director, Richie Bates, and treasurer, Toni Fulton, my debt is endless, as it is to Judy Marshall. Thank you.

In recognising those contributions, I am also very aware that other factors contributed to our positive outcome—and that was, through any analysis, the impact of the Palaszczuk government on our campaign. Over the first term of this government, we in Cairns saw strong investment in our schools, essential infrastructure and job-creating activities. This government's policies provided the people of Cairns with real investment and growth, and the people of Cairns responded. I thank the Premier, her ministers and the government for their investment in our city and our future, more importantly.

I would also naturally like to thank the people of Cairns. Understandably, as many of you told me, your faith in the parliamentary process was rattled in the last parliament. As I have said many times, I am beholden to you, the people of Cairns. My commitment to you and to the Labor Party and its values is sound and unbreakable. I make that pledge to you here today.

Whilst I will refrain from providing the members of this chamber with a full history lesson about the city of Cairns, I do feel impelled to touch on its past, and I stipulate in broad terms, as I believe it provides some lessons into where our future lies. Founded in 1876, Cairns was fundamentally a frontier town supporting the gold rush and providing grounds for a tax and excise collection point. During the gold rush period, a railway was built that serviced the Atherton Tablelands. Inevitably, as things happened, the gold rush died out and the people of Far North Queensland were forced to look at other ways to make a living. The need to embrace change was identified.

The already established rail link provided the essential infrastructure which enabled mining, agriculture and timber industries to be established and, as a result, it enabled these products to be shipped to southern markets through the port of Cairns. Around this same period, it became very clear that our flat coastal plains, rich in alluvial soil, would be suitable for growing sugar cane, which was a growing industry across Queensland at that time. The rich, life-filled waters of the Coral Sea and the Great Barrier Reef provided the grounds for the establishment of a thriving fishing industry, along with significant beche-de-mer and pearl shell industries, which became the largest industries in Far North Queensland in the 1890s.

With the federal government's 1901 legislation outlawing the kidnapping of the South Pacific islanders, employment opportunities for new Australians increased and our region saw an influx of Italian, Spanish and other European migrants all prepared to work hard and build a future in this harsh but unique tropical paradise. Their presence is very much alive today and well represented in our communities, my own children being an example.

The transition from the early gold rush period with a patchwork economy to an agricultural/fishing based economy proved successful and profitable for the people of the north. From the 1920s onwards locals like the Hayles family, who commenced a regular ferry service from Cairns to Green Island in 1924, began to provide the foundation stones of an early tourism industry.

Prior to, during and after the Second World War, international tourism began to grow. There is little doubt that the marlin fishing industry, supported by a number of locals and, strangely enough, an ex-US marine who had been based in Cairns during the war, George Bransford, helped put Cairns on the map. Vince Vlasoff and Lloyd Grigg, amongst others from the 1940s and 1950s, all contributed to the foundations of what we have today with the establishment of the world's first ever underwater observatory. Crocodile farms and museums highlighting the rich and ancient cultures of our region in addition to high profile visits to the Great Barrier Reef from the 1970s onwards all contributed to our growth. Our economic future was shifting slowly towards this new industry called tourism, as it had been since the 1920s.

As technology and aviation grew and the world became a smaller place, more people became aware of the amazing wonders of the Great Barrier Reef and as a result demand for Cairns and the surrounds grew. Visionaries like Paul Kamsler Senior, who built the first international hotel in Cairns in 1982, was amongst a small group to recognise the opportunities which lay ahead. Mr Kamsler, amongst others, recognised the importance of aviation and its connection to tourism and its essential role in our

city's future. Over the last three decades a wide range of commercial interests have invested in Cairns and our region, building a world-class, natural international tourism destination. The importance of this industry to the citizens of our city should never be underestimated.

I often wonder what legendary Cairns aviator Tom McDonald would think of our airport today, compared to his days back in 1928 when, flying his Gypsy Moth, he could only take off and land between high tides at Machans Beach. Last year our international and domestic airport transacted over 5.2 million people through its doors. Tourism is now the biggest industry in Cairns and our region, generating over \$3.4 billion annually. We receive 2.1 million domestic visitors annually, along with 859,000 international visitors. Of those visitors, 87 per cent arrive by aircraft.

The importance of our airport to the economy of our city and region is fundamental. That has been well and truly acknowledged by the Palaszczuk government through its increased investment in the attracting Asia aviation fund. Whilst Cairns continues to do well from the tourism perspective, we need to ensure that we continue to provide world-class experiences in addition to fertile grounds for sound economic investment. We can look at the tens of millions invested by offshore companies like Daikyo, who in the 1980s and 1990s employed many locals. Over decades they were able to put their children through school and paid off mortgages. We only need to look at their infrastructure which dominates our landscape today to recognise their tangible contribution to our city.

We have seen many multinationals invest in our city and region. I for one was employed for 17 years by an offshore multinational who was one of the largest private employers in our region and whose contribution to our regional economy over the last 29 years could best be described as 'significant'. Only recently we have had another offshore investor ploughing hundreds of millions into our city and region. This, in addition to the expansion and upgrade of our convention centre, a key economic driver in our region, along with the \$120 million expansion of our port and the ongoing process of engagement for our global tourism hub, proves our strong position and presents a bright future for Cairns.

We should never take our enviable position in the tourism industry for granted. We have inherited this strong position from hardworking men and women who have gone before for us. We need to ensure that we continue to build on their legacy, ensuring jobs and opportunities for our children and our city's growth. In doing this, we need to contribute to new developing tourism trends by identifying new products, like the Wangetti Track, a multifunctional product attracting an ever-growing range of new-style adventure tourists.

As the world becomes a more crowded place, what we have will be in greater demand. The two oldest cultures on earth—the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures—our unique Great Barrier Reef and our ancient and timeless rainforests will continue to provide the foundation stones for our city's future opportunities. Bearing in mind that our city's and our region's greatest assets are our natural assets, we also need to ensure that we retain and do everything in our power to protect them.

As the first member for Cairns who comes from the tourism industry, I look forward to working with the industry and its elected bodies, ensuring a strong and profitable tourism industry which will benefit all in our city and region. Whilst investment in the tourism industry continues to provide thousands of jobs and many great opportunities, it is my belief and that of many others that we need to liberate our economy from the reliance on one sector by growing other industries in our city. As has been acknowledged by political, social and economic commentators around the world, this century will be dominated by the Asia-Pacific region. As that region continues to grow, Cairns is geographically strategically better placed than any other city on the east coast of Australia to capitalize on the opportunities emanating from that growth.

The growing demand for university education from a rapidly developing middle class in the Asia-Pacific region presents Cairns with very real opportunities. Cairns is within eight hours flying time to over 60 million students who are looking for a safe, affordable and quality university education. Currently, Cairns has 16 English language colleges and two satellite campuses: James Cook University and Central Queensland University. According to Study Cairns, our city was visited by 32,000 students last year. The foundations of this growing industry are well and truly established.

The growing cost of a university education in Sydney, Melbourne or, dare I say, Brisbane presents a huge opportunity for Cairns. An increase in our university student population will ensure growth in our services sector, a positive impact on our real estate sector—in particular, the sale price of units—and growth in the visiting friends and relatives market, which will provide our tourism industry with an ever-increasing source of new business, not to mention the benefits of strong personal connections which will be built by those students and our city and citizens. My intention is to work with our education industry and explore the opportunities which lie ahead in this exciting new chapter of our city's development.

Cairns is truly a global city, as I said, with two Indigenous cultures, but we also have over 70 active multicultures in the region. This is evident in the variety of cultural practitioners we have working such as filmmakers, musicians, performing arts, theatre and visual artists. Of our population 25 per cent were born overseas and 18 per cent do not speak English in their own home. That is testimony to the unique and creative qualities of the city of Cairns. This is reflected in our culturally rich events like the Cairns Tropical Writers Festival, Cairns Ukulele Festival, the world famous Cairns Indigenous Arts Fair and the Pacific Island community events, just to name a few.

It is professional arts companies like JUTE Theatre, KickArts, Centre for Australasian Theatre and the Cairns Art Gallery that ensure our local practitioners have access to incredible opportunities. Vital to the ecology of a strong arts sector is the capacity-building agency, Arts Nexus. It is a national forerunner that has been leading the way in supporting our micro creative businesses in the region for over 20 years. It is considered a model for regional service delivery and is strongly supported by Arts Queensland. Our cultural and arts sector is an essential part of our community and, apart from enhancing our visitors' stay, it provides real career opportunities for many across our community.

While I have had the wonderful privilege of working in the tourism industry for over 25 years, travelling the world extensively, selling and marketing Cairns, Port Douglas and the Great Barrier Reef to wholesale and inbound operators, working with passionate people, contributing to the success of our region, and winning state and national marketing awards, my parents' direction of giving back to our community has never been lost on me. As a result, I have been a director and chairman of the largest community housing not-for-profit organisation in North Queensland in a voluntary capacity for nearly a decade. I am therefore acutely aware of the complex challenges faced by many in our community and the impact that that has on our community. I recognise the challenges we face owing to the collapse of the traditional family unit due to substance abuse, illicit drugs and domestic violence.

I make this commitment to you today: my contribution in these areas will be evidence based and not populist. I will work with the government, the private sector and non-government agencies to find innovative and effective solutions to these challenges. However, this must be done as a collective, as the solutions to many of our challenges lie within our communities.

I understand the importance of recreational and sporting activities, especially for our young people, and I will make this a priority. I know the benefits these opportunities bring to kids and the positive life changes these opportunities provide. The same applies to our local schools. We have hardworking, passionate teachers, teacher aides and principals, and we need to ensure that all members of our community are aware of the vast benefits associated with regular school attendance. Education is a vital component to a successful and socially cohesive community, and it will remain a strong priority for me to ensure that we have the best for our schools. I will also ensure that I will do everything I can to help those teachers and principals in growing the attendance rate.

I do not intend to allow politics to get in the way of working with my federal counterpart or my interesting regional councillors. I hope that our passion and vision for Cairns and our region will overcome any petty political point-scoring. This will apply to a vast range of matters like the expansion of Cairns port; growing our marine services industry; our agribusinesses; water security; importantly, our social services; and a range of other issues and industries.

As I heard somebody say in the chamber recently—and I think we are all very aware—I am also very aware that we cannot tax ourselves into prosperity and that the benefits of economic, social and cultural growth need to benefit all in our community. Those benefits need to be jobs, for it is a well-known fact that when you have a job or a career you have self-respect, dignity and self-worth. You are creating a solid foundation that you can build on to have a successful future; you are contributing to a better community. Taking into account the fact that 80 per cent of Cairns businesses are small businesses, this must—and will—remain a strong focus for me. This is a foundation principle for me personally. I am so proud to be a member of a government which believes in this and has reflected this in their policies.

Over the last several months since my election I have had the opportunity to meet with so many hardworking members of the Cairns community who are involved in such a wide range of careers and industries. This includes the vast number of volunteers from our sporting and social clubs. The list is endless, as is their passion for our city.

It would be fair to say that most Far North Queenslanders have a very healthy scepticism of what comes out of this particular chamber and the southern parts of Queensland. They are hardworking and pioneering because they have had to be, as our past shows. I do not expect an easy ride from the people I represent, but to the people of Cairns I pledge strong representation regardless of political affiliations. I will work hard; I will be active in community life; and I will be accessible to them. Above all, I will always have your best interests at the forefront of my thinking, and I will never lose sight of the great privilege you have bestowed upon me. Thank you.