



Speech by


# Rob Molhoek

## MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT

Hansard Tuesday, 29 May 2012

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### MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Mr MOLHOEK** (Southport—LNP) (7.55 pm): It is with a great sense of humility and pride that I rise today to deliver my first speech to the 54th Parliament of Queensland as a member of the Newman government. I am humbled by the trust that the people of Southport have placed in me and can assure them that I will not let them down. I am here today because they voted for change. Having won their votes, it is now incumbent upon me to earn their trust and respect. I also acknowledge the traditional owners of the Southport area—the Kombumerri and Ngarang-Wal people, people of saltwater and the Nerang River.

My parents arrived in Australia in 1952 with my older siblings Thea, John and Connie. They came looking for a new life and opportunities as far away from war-ravaged Europe as possible. My father, Matheus Cornelis Molhoek, a member of the Dutch air force at the time of German occupation, went on to survive the depravities and heartache of 2½ years in labour camps, Stalag B Muhlburg, about 80 miles south of Berlin, and Stalag 4C Brux. After a few years in Victoria my parents, like so many others since, decided the warmer climate and opportunities presented to them in Queensland were far more enticing, and so they moved north to Southport. My father, Ted, established a contracting business as a painter, signwriter and marine specialist. My mother, Margje, or Ria as she became known, cleaned the holiday homes of wealthy pastoralists and other holiday-makers. I was a surprise addition to their family, born over the back fence at Southport General Hospital in 1959, just three years before former member for Southport Mick Veivers made his rugby league Australian test debut in Brisbane and the same year the Gold Coast's first 10-storey giant high-rise Kinkabool was built.

My early years were fun but challenging. I remember travelling with my mother to Brisbane on the old steam train from Southport for visits to specialists due to my gammy legs. My older brother, John, would dink me up the Ferry Road hill on the back of his bike, making sure to keep my iron and leather clad legs clear of the spokes. Later, when my Forrest Gump style irons eventually came off, I enjoyed idyllic years of swimming, surfing, sailing and boating in and around the Broadwater, where my father painted many boats and did plenty of work around Marineland, Sea World and on buildings like the Sands, Iluka, Chateau and Tiki Village. As a child I enjoyed growing up around the Broadwater, and now it is up to me and my local parliamentary colleagues to give the Broadwater back to the people of Southport. Labor has neglected the Gold Coast's waterways, resulting in restricted access and amenity due to the build-up of sand. These waterways are vital to the region's economy and marine industry. Our government will act to ensure Gold Coast waterways are properly managed for the benefit of locals, boaties, fishers and tourists in a sustainable and environmentally sensitive manner.

In 1918, with a population of 2,000, Southport was proclaimed a town and severed from Nerang. Southport flourished. The 1930s saw the construction of a new town hall in Nerang Street and two new bathing pavilions, one on Marine Parade and the second across the Broadwater in Main Beach. The postwar years saw Southport flourish, with the population nearly trebling to 7,500 in holiday periods and 50 houses a month being built when postwar restrictions were lifted in 1952. Southport, the coast's oldest suburb, is home to long-established schools of St Hilda's for girls, the Southport School for boys and Guardian Angels Convent and Star of the Sea Primary School, which was established in 1898. Other schools include Southport State High School, Arundel State School, AB Paterson College, Aquinas

College, Ashmore State School and Musgrave Hill State School, where each of my four sons—Timothy, David, Matthew and Andrew—were educated and where my youngest son is currently vice-captain.

My older boys attended Trinity College and are now students at Griffith University. My schooling was also in the electorate, where I attended Southport State School and then Keebra Park State High School, where I was among the first foundation students enrolled in 1973. It was at Keebra Park under the inspiration of Garfield Prowse, our principal, where my early leadership abilities were nurtured and I learnt the simple mantra and only school rule: do the right thing. It was also there that I developed my early love of rugby league. While I was a terrible player, unlike Mr Mander, that did not stop me from taking on the NRL and working with Michael Searle, Paul Broughton, Geoff Smith, Jim Raptis and others to establish the Gold Coast Titans in the National Rugby League. I am sure all Queenslanders were pleased to see the Titans register back-to-back wins for the first time since 2010 last weekend, with a strong 24-14 victory over the Knights in Newcastle.

While Southport's prominence may have waned a little in recent years compared with the apartment boom along the foreshore areas of the Gold Coast, it is today a sleeping giant. As we prepare for Southport's Centenary in 2018 and the Commonwealth Games that same year, we have before us a unique opportunity to leverage a new future for Southport and the Gold Coast and, with that future, more permanent jobs and greater economic prosperity. As the new local member, it is my sincere hope to lead that fight for Southport's revitalisation from the industrial areas of Ashmore and Molendinar to the health and knowledge precinct around Parklands and Southport's central business district. By working with local business leaders and residents and listening to these people, we have developed a simple plan for Southport. Southport will once again be the flourishing, vibrant central business district of the Gold Coast and internationally renowned for its standards of business accommodation, health care and tertiary education. Our priorities also include the restoration of law and order, standing up for families, finding more jobs and creating more opportunity. I will work towards the realignment of the Southport-Nerang Road and, with my colleagues, work to deliver a more robust tourism industry and deliver on our government's promise to double overnight tourism expenditure to \$30 billion by 2020.

As a former Gold Coast city councillor, I fought for the rapid transit light rail system and will continue to fight for improved public transport and connectivity with heavy rail. Greater connectivity is essential if we are to fully leverage the new Gold Coast University Hospital, the Games Village, our growing Griffith University, the redevelopment of TAFE, the Gold Coast campus of the University of Central Queensland and our almost 8,000 other Southport business based enterprises. The evolution of an improved rapid transit system will be an essential and sustainable lifeline for families in the north and west of the city. It will not only provide access to the beach and tourist spots but more importantly access to jobs in our core business areas.

My political journey began when my sister Connie took me to a protest rally against Gough Whitlam's proposed reforms to Australia's manufacturing industry and tariff reforms at age 15. I subsequently handed out how-to-vote cards for many greats of the old Queensland National Party, including Bruce Small, Ivan Gibbs and Eric Robinson, culminating in serving cups of tea at the opening of the Sir Joh House in Southport. Since then, I cannot remember an election when I have not supported the campaign efforts of Liberal and National candidates from Devonport in Tasmania in the nineties to Stuart Robert in Fadden and current members of this House from Mermaid Beach and Gaven.

After more than two decades as a broadcaster and senior executive, I decided in 2003 to run for the Gold Coast City Council. Cheered on by John Fradgley, my great mate Geoff Smith and then mayor Gary Baidon, I was honoured to win the 2004 election for Division 4 and to represent the people of Arundel, Parkwood, Biggera Waters and Labrador. In my four short years as a Gold Coast city councillor and chairman of the city's Finance and Internal Services Committee, I was pleased to deliver four years of budget surpluses, reduced debt, almost \$3 billion of new city-wide infrastructure and many great local outcomes and facilities for the ratepayers of Division 4. In 2008 I contested the Gold Coast mayoralty and lost. Later that year I joined the LNP and in November 2011 was preselected by my local branch to run for the seat of Southport. I could no longer stand back and watch Southport and Queensland deteriorate any further under Labor's mismanagement.

I grew up in Southport. I am raising my family in Southport. I love Southport. Under Labor, an estimated 13.5 per cent of all households are in housing stress. Not only has the cost of living escalated but so, too, have median house prices and median rents. According to the Department of Housing, statistics for the Gold Coast show that we have the highest number of households waiting for long-term social housing, with 1,903 families in the very-high and high-needs categories—700 more than Brisbane Central and 900 more than the Sunshine Coast—and 31 per cent of those waiting in South-East Queensland are on the Gold Coast. Is it any wonder the people of Southport and Queensland voted for change?

Under Labor, unemployment in Southport recorded amongst the highest in Queensland at 10.4 per cent and personal income is typically thousands of dollars lower than that of average Australians. Is it any wonder that the people of Southport voted for change? Is it any wonder that the people of Southport turned to the LNP and Campbell Newman's can-do plan to get Queensland back on track? I am proud to be part of the Newman government and firmly believe in our plan to build a four-pillar economy, lower the cost of living for families, deliver better planning and infrastructure, revitalise front-line services and restore accountability in government. Our can-do commitments to make tourism No. 1 again, getting the construction industry back on track and reducing unemployment to four per cent in six years are just what the Gold Coast and Southport need.

I am also pleased to be part of a government which plans to double food production in Queensland by 2040. As someone who married into an agricultural family, I appreciate only too well the challenges faced by many on the land. I met my wife, Melinda, at the Rockhampton Baptist Tabernacle in 1981. Woolworths based me at Northside Plaza as a young manager to open new stores in Gladstone, Hervey Bay, Blackwater and Emerald. Melinda's parents, Helen and John Pierce, are third generation graziers and farmers. Her sister Robyn Rich and husband Jim have Walal Station at Charleville and Mount Ravenswood on the Burdekin. Her brother Gary and wife Joyanne have Currawong near Baralaba. In the 1970s Melinda's dad cut railway sleepers to keep the family afloat at a time when poor cattle prices and drought combined to make things really tough. They later moved west to Triangle at Banana where our sons received an education into life on the land from their many aunts, uncles and cousins on properties around Central Queensland. When there was mustering, castrating, inoculating and branding to be done, Melinda would get back in the saddle with her dad. And me? Well, I would put on the kettle and babysit the kids.

Last year under Labor, Southport's Magistrates Court recorded almost double the number of protection orders in respect of domestic violence, and these numbers do not even take into account the thousands of child protection notifications recorded, further highlighting the appalling failure of Labor to protect families and our children. In May 2004 an older lady from Arundel came to see me one morning at the local shopping centre about her granddaughters. These two young girls and 11 others had been systematically sexually abused by their coach while others allowed it to happen. It was this incident that led me to renowned child safety campaigner and advocate Hetty Johnston and my subsequent board role with Bravehearts. No child deserves to be robbed of their innocence. A modern, flourishing society such as ours should never be excused for allowing this to occur, nor should we watch on idly and allow our women to be bashed in their own homes nor allow drug dealers and unscrupulous licensed venue operators to prey on our sons and daughters.

We have been given great responsibility. It is up to us to deliver a safer Queensland. It is up to us to make Queensland the safest place to raise a child. In this light I cannot adequately express how humbled I was to receive the Premier's call and request to work with Minister Tracy Davis as Assistant Minister for Child Safety. We need to get Queensland families back on track. Under Labor we have seen two major inquiries into child safety. Under Labor over 150 recommendations were adopted, spending has increased almost fiftyfold and yet we are still to see any real improvement in the care and safety of our children.

I am pleased that the Premier has committed to establishing a new inquiry into child safety and I welcome our government's commitment to the introduction of a two strikes policy for sexual predators who commit serious sex crimes against children. Where Labor has failed, we must not. We must provide our kids with a more rounded education and teach our boys what it really means to be men. We must protect, honour and cherish our women. We must work harder to create a society where all people are valued, regardless of gender, race, religion or ethnicity.

Over the past years I have been blessed to have had some great mentors and friends—people like my 'other' dad, Fred Stallard; Paul Broughton; Brian Willesdorf; Bruce Lindley; Rhys Holleran; the member for Mermaid Beach, Ray Stevens; Pastor Garry Mac; Bravehearts child protection hero Hetty Johnston; and, more recently, my incredible branch president, James Kennett. Aside from the challenge of mentoring my own sons, who incidentally are individually growing up to become fine young men, I will in turn commit to mentoring and raising the next generation of leaders and work with others from Southport to establish meaningful mentoring programs for our young people.

I am so grateful that the people of Southport have chosen me as their new member and I am immensely proud to present myself to this parliament as the new member for Southport. However, I would not be here today had it not been for the generous support of my branch and Southport SEC: Bernard Ponting, Bruce Duncan, Bruce McIver, my many friends and volunteers and the support of members from the Surfers Paradise and Broadwater LNP branches. They are all part of the reason I am here today and I say thank you to each and every one of them. I especially want to thank the Gold Coast Young LNP, led by Herman Vorster and his wife, Melissa. To my campaign team, I want to make special mention of Stephen Petith, who gave up his studies to work almost full-time for the latter part of 2011 and the early months of 2012. I also want to acknowledge the role of James and Elaine Kennett, Don Ross, Jenna Rathbone,

Wayne Moran, Jan Knox, Derryl McConaghy, Glen and Angeline Ayrton, Geoff Smith, Liz and Gary Crouch, Craig Devlin, Mitch Redford—my battleground coordinator—and the LNP campaign team. I thank all of them for helping me win this seat.

Lastly, and most importantly, to my amazing wife, Melinda, of 26 years and our four sons, David, Tim, Matt and Andrew: thanks for folding and delivering all those campaign brochures, thanks for putting up with grumpy old dad and thanks for sharing our home and this journey with me. Last weekend I told the boys that, in light of all I have been learning about the plight of some children across Queensland in recent weeks, perhaps I am not quite the grump they thought I was and perhaps they were a little more fortunate than I believed them to be.

I would like to close with two of my most favourite quotes: a verse given to me on my 21st birthday and the words of George Bernard Shaw. The first is from 1 Corinthians 15:58—

So, my dear brothers and sisters, be strong and immovable. Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is in vain.

The second is the words of George Bernard Shaw—

This is the true joy in life, being used for a purpose recognised by yourself as a mighty one. Being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy. I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it what I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no brief candle to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for the moment and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.

I thoroughly enjoyed my first full day in parliament the other week. I could not help but reflect on what an awesome privilege it is to be here in this House—a working-class kid from Southport, the son of an immigrant painter, elected by my community. What an honour. What an immense privilege. My commitment is not only to represent the people of Southport and the Gold Coast well but to advocate and fight for the restoration of Christian and community values, to be a champion for our women, our children and for families and to cheer on the next generation.

**Honourable members:** Hear, hear!