



Speech by

## Mr TIM MULHERIN

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

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Hansard 12 September 1995

### FIRST SPEECH

**Mr MULHERIN** (Mackay) (12.27 p.m.): As the newly elected member for Mackay, I wish to associate myself with the sentiments of the mover and seconder of the motion for the adoption of the Address in Reply. I also extend my sincere congratulations to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, on your election to that position.

My opportunity to enter this House was brought about by the retirement from politics of my predecessor, the Honourable Edmund Denis Casey. Sadly, Mr Casey's retirement was precipitated by ill health. Happily, I am able to report that already, after only a very short time in retirement from politics, Mr Casey's health has improved markedly. I hope that this augurs well for a long, happy and healthy retirement.

For over 80 years, the Mackay electorate has had continuous representation by a Labor Party member in the Queensland Parliament. That is a unique situation. No other electorate can claim continuous representation by the one political party for such a length of time. I am very conscious of this long tradition and the history of support that the Mackay electorate has given to the Labor Party. I will certainly do my best to carry on that tradition with the goodwill and support of my workers and supporters and the confidence of the electors of Mackay. As the new member for Mackay, I will be focusing my energies on fostering the development of all aspects of the Mackay community. This means not only economic and industrial development, which is already so strong in Mackay, but also addressing the important social and cultural needs of our community. I will be working to ensure that Mackay continues to be recognised as the important regional centre of Queensland that it is.

The City of Mackay has always been well represented in Parliament. The first member for Mackay, Francis Thyssen Amhurst, was elected on 21 November 1879. Whilst there were seven different people elected to represent Mackay during the first 36 years of representation, for the last 80 years only three have been elected to office. In July 1915, the late Honourable William Forgan Smith was elected. He was the member for Mackay for over 27 years. Over that period, he served with great distinction as a member, as a Minister of the Crown and as a long-serving Premier.

In July 1943, Frederick Dickson Graham became the member for Mackay. Mr Graham devoted 26 years to the people of Mackay and the State of Queensland in the Parliament. During this time, he was a very hardworking and available representative. He is still remembered fondly in Mackay for his great worth and many personal acts of kindness. It gives me much pleasure to report that Mr Graham, who is in his nineties, enjoys good health and lives in happy retirement at Sandgate. Following Mr Graham, in May 1969 Edmund Casey was elected to Parliament. Until his retirement in July this year, he served the Parliament for 26 years.

I wish to take this early opportunity to record my congratulations to Mr Casey on a great political career, which I am sure is unparalleled in both length of service and achievements in this State. Edmund Casey's grandfather was a founder of the Labor movement in Mackay, and his father, Jack Casey, was the long-time head of the party in Mackay from the 1930s to the 1950s. As a young boy, Edmund shared his family's great interest in politics. It was only natural that he would one day end up in this Chamber. In 1967, he was elected to the Mackay City Council with a record vote and was immediately appointed deputy mayor and council representative on the Mackay Harbour Board. During his term with the council, he chaired numerous council committees and was delegate to all local

government conferences, where he gained a great insight into regional Queensland, which equipped him well as leader of the party and later as Minister for Primary Industries.

There were three great anchors in Edmund Casey's life. They were the source of tremendous fortitude that he showed in the face of tumultuous and turbulent times. Those anchors were: family, faith and friends. Edmund Casey's religious faith is deep, unpretentious and very sincere. I know it is a source of strength to him. I know also that it is lived out with humanity and integrity. Edmund's political faith has been severely tested. As honourable members would be aware, he ran as an independent Labor candidate in 1972 after he lost endorsement for the ALP, yet his belief in the political and industrial ideals of the Labor movement was not deserted or abandoned. To his great credit, he firmly rejected attempts by the National Party to entice him over the political fence—something that he would not even contemplate. His political skill and leadership quality guided the Labor Party in this State into a time of renewal and restructure.

In his inaugural speech, Edmund Casey spoke quite extensively about the sugar industry and the valuable contribution this industry made to the State's economy. He also spoke about the need to develop a strategic long-term water resources plan for the State. It was only fitting then that, upon the election of the Goss Labor Government in December 1989, Edmund Casey was appointed as Minister for Primary Industries, which enabled him to implement his vision for the sugar industry and water resources in this State. Edmund Casey was arguably one of the greatest Primary Industries Ministers this State has had, and his legacy of administration has ensured that our primary industries are well placed to compete in a highly competitive world.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the tremendous contribution and support that Edmund Casey received from his wife, Laurie. As a country member's wife, Laurie successfully juggled her time between family and public life. Laurie has been a tireless community worker and, in common with Edmund, she did anything for anyone regardless of colour, class or creed. To Edmund and Laurie I say: thank you for all the support and personal advice you have given me and my wife and for all that you have done for the people of Mackay in all your years of public life.

I must also place on record my thanks and appreciation to Edmund Casey for the valuable advice and guidance he gave to me when acting as my campaign director in the recent election campaign. I would also like to thank other members of my campaign team—Frank Gilbert, my campaign manager; Bruce Litte, my campaign coordinator; Don Rolls; Pat Noonan; Matthew Skinner; Gary Matthews; Lofty Cathcart; Gary Bell; and Mark Stroppiana—for their hard work and patience. To my wife, Erin, my parents, Leo and Helen, my brothers, Pat and Martin, Martin's wife, Helen, and my 91-year-old grandmother, Susan Mulherin, I say: thank you for the emotional and physical support you gave me during the campaign. Those people, along with members of the Mackay branches of the Australian Labor Party—booth workers and supporters—created the impetus that resulted in my election to Parliament.

For the information of honourable members, I would like to point out my family history and work background and speak about the part that I see myself playing as a new member in this third Goss Labor Government. In the early 1880s, my great grandparents, Patrick and Ellen Mulherin, migrated to Mackay from Ireland. They were some of the earliest pioneers in the sugar industry. One of their sons, Tom Mulherin, founded the first cooperative sugar mill in Queensland, namely, Farleigh Mill, which became the model for the formation of other cooperative mills in the sugar industry. Another of their sons, John Martin Mulherin, was one of the instigators of the construction of the present outer harbour in Mackay and, in fact, was the longest-serving member of the Mackay Harbour Board, having served from 1934 until his death in 1957.

I am the eldest of six children of a single-income, working-class family and am pleased to have both my parents, Leo and Helen, along with my wife, Erin, and her mother, Rose Smith, in the Chamber today. In 1975, I worked as a clerk at Michelmores, a well-known local firm, and in 1976 I joined the employ of the Queensland Electricity Commission until 1993. During my employment with the Queensland Electricity Commission, I was employed in the transmission branch, overseeing the day-to-day administration of the Mackay office. My concerns for my fellow workers led to my involvement as an active member of the Australian Service Union, and I represented the union at both local delegate level and State branch council level. In 1993, I resigned from the electricity industry and commenced employment as an organiser for the Labor Party, a position I held until my election as the member for Mackay.

Because of my family history and work background, I find it easy to relate to people, especially the average working-class people, those being the grassroots people of my electorate. I am looking forward to meeting with community groups to assure them that their views will be noted and acted upon where possible. I also hope to provide the people of Mackay with an open-door policy. I will do my best for each and every one of my constituents. I also hope to be able to raise local concerns within this Chamber and to provide advice and information to lobby groups within my electorate. The priorities in

my life are ones that I share with Edmund Casey. These are: family, faith and friends. These will certainly be evident in the way that I approach my responsibilities as the member for Mackay.

The electorate of Mackay, which consists of 21,911 enrolled constituents, encompasses areas both north and south of the Pioneer River and is bordered by the electorates of Whitsunday and Mirani. Mackay is recognised as the sugar capital of Australia. The Mackay district is one of the largest sugar-producing areas in Australia. The sugar industry contributes a large proportion of Mackay's economy and provides employment for hundreds of people, both directly and indirectly. There are approximately 44,000 hectares of sugarcane in the surrounding district, with an in-field production of 3.25 million tonnes. The harvest period extends from July to November.

Queensland Labor Governments have an impressive track record in terms of the sugar industry. The Labor Governments of T. J. Ryan and Forgan Smith firmly established that industry, and it is the Goss Labor Government that has overseen the expansion and restructuring of Queensland's sugar industry. As honourable members would be aware, State Cabinet will shortly consider the structure of the Committee of Review of the Queensland Sugar Industry. The review will look at the regulations that govern that great industry. It will also look at the marketing arrangements in respect of the National Competition Policy. There will be close consultation at all industry levels, and canefarmers should see the review not as a threat to their industry but as a challenge for the future.

It is important that the sugar industry adopt value adding. The Mackay Sugar Cooperative Association accepted the challenge of value adding by establishing, in conjunction with E. D. & F. Mann, the Mackay Sugar Refinery, located at Racecourse Mill near Mackay. But there is still a need for further downstream processing in the Mackay district, and I will work closely with the industry for the establishment of such things as a bagasse pulp mill and a confectionary and food processing industry.

The sugar industry is very conscious of the environment in which it operates. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the sugar industry on its initiative in conducting an environmental audit, and I look forward to assisting the industry in implementing the recommendations of this report. I have already mentioned that Mackay is the sugar capital of Australia, yet as sweet a success story as that industry is, there is much more to Mackay than sugar.

The Mackay regional economy is worth an estimated \$2.6 billion per annum. Mackay contributes in excess of 5 per cent of Queensland's gross State product. That represents a per capita contribution from the Mackay district to the Queensland economy of \$23,500, which is substantially above the State average of \$18,400. Mackay's economy is dominated by servicing the mining industry, mainly coal. The Goss Labor Government's recent redevelopment and capital upgrade of the harbour corporation's Dalrymple Bay coal export terminal has cost \$168m. This initiative has boosted the capacity of the port by 45 per cent. In addition, the recently announced \$50m upgrade of the Hay Point coal terminal by BHP and the State Government's announcement in its policy From Strength to Strength of the \$6.4m Eungella water pipeline to the Bowen Basin coal fields will ensure that the Mackay region plays a vital part in the continuing growth of this valuable export industry.

Mackay is an important wholesale and retail centre in regional Queensland and it acts as a trade and transport node to inland Queensland, and accordingly is reflected in the 6.5 per cent contribution to gross regional product by the transport sector. Mackay is well served by excellent harbour and airport facilities, both built by Labor Governments, and it stands as a gateway to the Whitsunday islands and the Great Barrier Reef.

Sixty years ago, a predecessor of mine, former Premier and member for Mackay, the late Honourable William Forgan Smith, ensured Mackay's economic future with the construction of the outer harbour. I am proud to be associated with the \$13m redevelopment of the Mackay port that is taking place under the Goss Labor Government. This redevelopment will ensure the commercial viability of the port well into the twenty-first century. It is ironic that most of the major developments at the port have occurred under Labor Governments. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Mackay Port Authority and its board members, under the chairmanship and guidance of Mr Ron Searle, on its successes. I pledge myself to continue working closely with the Mackay Port Authority to achieve the best for Mackay.

Another significant achievement of the Goss Labor Government has been the re-routing of the railway line out of Mackay city streets and the building of a new railway station and goods yard. Mackay is the centre of a rich and vibrant region. It is an educational, medical and administrative centre. The Goss Labor Government helped establish the Mackay campus of the University of Central Queensland in my electorate. It has continued to develop into an excellent educational facility, which will be invaluable to the development of research and higher education for the region. Hopefully, in the near future, more subjects will be available which will result in more courses being able to be completed on campus. This type of growth will negate the need for Mackay students to travel to other institutions to attain their professional qualifications, in turn keeping qualified professionals in Mackay.

In this term of Government, the Goss Labor Government will build a new district police headquarters in Mackay and refurbish the present historic police station at a cost of \$8.4m. This

includes a new watch-house facility and will mean that the people of Mackay will be served by the most up-to-date police facilities in Australia. I will work with police to ensure that Mackay receives its fair share of additional police officers.

Over the next 10 years, the Goss Labor Government will spend \$20m on redeveloping the Mackay Base Hospital. In the next three years, \$4.2m will be spent on upgrading the accident and emergency departments and refurbishing the obstetric and paediatric wards. I welcome the initiative of the Goss Labor Government in establishing the Associate Chair of Paediatrics at the Mackay Base Hospital as part of the North Queensland Medical School. This initiative will only enhance Mackay's ability to attract further specialist doctors to the area and, in addition, I am committed to ensuring that Mackay residents receive the best available medical and nursing care.

Mackay is one of the most livable cities in Australia. Nestled between national park, rare tropical rainforest and the wonderful Great Barrier Reef, Mackay city has natural and human resources second to none. Its people have established cultural and sporting organisations and facilities that would be unequalled in Australia on a per capita basis. Participation is the key word. Involvement in the arts and sport reaches from junior to masters levels. The Queensland Conservatorium of Music established its first campus outside of Brisbane in Mackay. It has continued to flourish and, from next year, under the auspices of the Central Queensland University, will be the Central Queensland Conservatorium of Music. It complements and supports the city's many musical and theatrical organisations.

Because Mackay is situated in such a unique environment, it is an obligation on our present generation to plan carefully and wisely for our future. Future developments must not only accommodate our physical needs but also ensure the preservation of the natural environment. Change and development must occur in a sustainable way. We owe this to our children and our children's children.

As promised in the election campaign, in the near future I will be moving for the establishment of the Mackay Wetland Advisory Group, the purpose of which will be to identify and advise Government on how to manage the valuable wetlands found in and around the Mackay region. The advisory group will consist of representatives from Government departments, industry, conservation groups and community organisations. The advisory group will allow community input into the management of this ecologically critical environment.

Likewise, I will be taking a special interest in the development of the Mackay Strategic Plan. The plan is about planning for the provision of facilities needed by residents 20 to 30 years down the track. The Goss Labor Government has already made available the services of a senior strategic planner to ensure that community ideas, concerns and suggestions are accommodated and assimilated into the plan. I will be working closely with the Mackay City Council to give effect to the most comprehensive community consultation possible. The Mackay Strategic Plan will involve Commonwealth, State and local governments and the Mackay community in a dynamic process that will enable a whole-of-Government approach to Mackay's future needs, especially transport. I restate here my absolute determination to have another road bridge crossing built over the Pioneer River for the people of Mackay in this term of office.

Possibly the most undervalued resource, yet the most significant, is water. Fortunately for the Mackay district, Edmund Casey did not suffer from this misapprehension. Due to his drive and foresight, in November 1993 the Teemburra Creek Dam project received funding of \$10m through the Sugar Industry Infrastructure Package. This funding, together with a commitment of \$10m from the Mackay Sugar Cooperative, an undertaking for future irrigators to provide \$5m and the balance of \$31.7m from the Goss Labor Government, has allowed construction to start and meant a considerable boost to water resource management in the Pioneer Valley. Teemburra Dam is a significant contribution to the future water needs of the Mackay district, but it is by no means sufficient. Water resource development in the Mackay district remains a high priority. I intend to exercise the same foresight and determination as my predecessor and continue to consult about, plan and support future water resource development in the Mackay district.

Being such a unique and beautiful place, Mackay naturally attracts visitors. Tourism is Mackay's fastest growing industry. The potential for future development is immense. Mackay people want the tourist industry to continue to grow and develop in a way that will not despoil Mackay's uniqueness.

I restate: Mackay's greatest strength is her people. To illustrate this, I pay tribute to two particular groups who live in Mackay: the Maltese community and the South Sea Islander community. Mackay was a multicultural community long before many other parts of Australia. Maltese immigrants settled in and around Mackay in the early part of this century. They played a significant role in developing the sugar industry. The Maltese have enriched and broadened the Mackay community greatly. The Maltese Festival held last year illustrated this graphically. It was a celebration of all that is positive about the contributions of immigrants to Australian society.

The Mackay South Sea Islanders are the descendants of the 55,000 to 60,000 Melanesians who were brought to Queensland between 1863 and 1904 to develop the sugar industry. They came

from many Pacific islands, mainly from Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands. They were often brought to Australia against their will. It is undoubtedly true that they were generally abused and exploited—just like slaves. Between 1904 and 1906 most were deported under the White Australia Policy. However, about 2,400 people either evaded deportation or were exempt from it. Given this background, the proud and enduring sense of community and identity among Mackay South Sea Islanders is even more impressive. Their dignity and humanity has sustained them in their long struggle for recognition and justice and has earned them the most profound respect of the Mackay community.

It would be remiss of me to not mention the original inhabitants of the Mackay area. In the 1930s Norman Tindale recorded the local Aborigines in the area as being of the Juipera language group with boundaries running from St Helens in the north to St Lawrence in the south and as far out as the Connors Range as the sun goes down. Those people were saved from being completely dispersed by the Native Police through the establishment of Queensland's first Aboriginal reserve in 1871. The reserve was situated in a area from Bakers Creek to Sandy Creek south of Mackay. The Government's reason for setting up this reserve was purely economic: the remaining Aborigines were used as a source of labour for the sugar industry.

Today, the story of the Juipera people is best represented by the local legend about The Leap, a mountain situated some 30 kilometres north of Mackay. Legend goes that a Juipera woman was wronged, hounded like an animal by the Native Police and, in a bid to escape, leapt, carrying her baby, from the top of the mountain. She died in the fall but, amazingly, her baby survived and was raised by a local white family. Her descendants still live in the Mackay district today. I am committed to the ongoing reconciliation process for Aboriginal people and I will continue to work for the recognition of the South Sea Islanders' community concerns by the Queensland Government.

I recognise that the future of my region in this State lies with young people. Too often, young people generally are blamed for many of today's problems. I believe that that is far too sweeping a statement. Each of us has a responsibility to ensure that our youth are given the best opportunities to succeed in life, and I welcome the recent election policies of the Goss Government which direct money and resources to providing a positive future for our young people. I am committed to working closely with youth agencies and youth support agencies to gain first-hand knowledge of the problems facing our youth today. I will be taking a personal involvement in those issues, beginning with a night street walk with local community leaders. That will provide a valuable insight into developing a Mackay Safety Action Project.

That project is aimed at reducing the incidence of alcohol-related violence, public disorder and harm in the identified central business district of Mackay—especially violence occurring in and around licensed premises—and increasing the responsibility of operators of licensed premises, developing and facilitating task groups, conducting surveys, including venue-risk assessments, and producing a report of findings and recommendations that I intend to bring to the attention of my Government.

Finally, as I said earlier, I am very conscious of the long tradition and history of support the Mackay electorate has given to the Labor Party. I will certainly do my best to carry on that tradition and I pledge myself to the people of Mackay, the State of Queensland and this Parliament.

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