



Speech By  
**Michael Healy**

**MEMBER FOR CAIRNS**

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**ADDRESS-IN-REPLY**

 **Mr HEALY** (Cairns—ALP) (6.42 pm): I rise in reply to the speech made by the Governor when opening the 57th Parliament and I apologise to everyone for interrupting the lovely story that we were just hearing. I begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which we have gathered today and pay my respects to their elders both past and present.

I will begin where I should, which is obviously to thank the people of Cairns. This is the second time I have won the seat and I can tell the House that it was a tough gig. We had a battle out there, but I had some very strong support. I had strong support from business, from the tourism sector and from the community sector. There are a lot of people who supported us and they are not just the party faithful, whom I acknowledge and I will run through a list of names in a moment. There was a really strong community push. When I got this job I made it abundantly clear that I came from the tourism industry. I wanted to make clear what we needed to improve our city. Obviously my Labor values intertwined with my commercial values made me a far more attractive proposition than those put up by the other parties. I acknowledge the other parties that contested the seat. Most of them were half reasonable, but I won and that is the way it is.

**Mr Krause** interjected.

**Mr HEALY:** That is an interjection so you have lost.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Kelly): Order! Comments will come through the chair.

**Mr HEALY:** I am sorry, Mr Deputy Speaker. As I said, I want to acknowledge the party faithful. A huge number of people did an enormous amount to help me get here. I acknowledge the hours that we all spent door knocking and on the phones. The member for Burleigh touched on pre-polling, which is now a very important part of campaigning. We are seeing significant changes in the way people vote and pre-polling was fundamental for us. I acknowledge Tony Fulton, Robin and Glen Cleland, Paul Hiriyama—

**Ms Pease** interjected.

**Mr HEALY:** Yes, Tony is great. Owen Mallon did a fantastic job as did Max King and Alan Griffiths. I acknowledge the representatives from my union: Dave Hearse, Richard Billingham, Royce Grimwade, Sharon and Shannon Swanson. The AWU did a fantastic job and a range of other unions supported me. I acknowledge Susan Prince, David Anthony, Pat Bailey, Pamela Wilde, Rodney Meiklejohn—it was good to see Rodney; I had not seen him for a while—Peter Doyle, Bob Richardson, Michael Byrne, Jacob Wilson, Farah Tawfeek, Richie Bates, Jo 'The Viking' Crljen, Bob Paten, Chris Rollason, Trish Berrill, Wayne Costelloe, Judy Marshall, Cathy Lovern, Kesa Streiby, Stewart Williams, Mike Kyle, Colleen Duke and many more. That was just on pre-polling; on the day literally hundreds of people worked to support me. I cannot express strongly enough how much I appreciate their input and what they did for us.

As I said, ours was a grassroots campaign. There was a strong push by the LNP on the crime issue. It was very personal, but we grew above that and pushed what we knew was vitally important. I will address some of those issues in the coming 16 minutes or it might even be 14 minutes. We will see how we go. There is a little thing going on that I will explain to you later, Mr Deputy Speaker. It will all become very clear and highly entertaining.

COVID-19 presented us with a number of huge and unprecedented challenges. In my maiden speech I talked about what was going to be vitally important for Cairns. Obviously we have a \$2.8 billion tourism industry that is a huge employer of 25,000 people. Whilst we have some significant Australian organisations that invest in our region, one or two large international organisations also invest in our region. We need to be able to slowly move towards and create other industries, whilst ensuring that we keep our tourism industry.

Who could have imagined this thing that we now call COVID? Many in our community have had their lives turned upside-down. The livelihoods of families, friends and neighbours have been destroyed. It has been a tragedy. Many people have lost their jobs. A lot of regions have been impacted but none more so than my city of Cairns where the impact has been absolutely unbelievable. I have spent most of my working life in the tourism industry. I have worked with those people. They are mum-and-dad operators. Some people have their houses on the line. They work long hours. When the worst happened we tried to do everything we could. I am confident that as a government we have done a lot.

As I said the other day, I recognise the significant contribution that the federal government has made through JobKeeper. We all recognise the importance of that program, certainly for regional areas. I know of the blood, sweat and tears it takes to create memorable holidays and experiences. I also know that the industry will face more challenges moving forward, but I am confident that we will work our way out.

I acknowledge and thank the Premier and the minister for making me the Assistant Minister for Tourism Industry Development. While the role gives me a lot to do, it also allows me to be a voice for the tourism industry by giving me the opportunity to talk about what is important—and not just for Cairns. I have been involved in international, domestic and local tourism. There is a wide range of areas covered by this complex industry. I am very pleased that the Premier has seen fit to put me in a position where I can work with the minister and the industry to ensure that we do all we can.

Things such as the \$10,000 adaptation grants have been helpful, as have electricity rebates, payroll tax deferrals and \$2 billion worth of cheap loans. All of those things were enormously helpful. When we look at the funding support for tourism icons we are talking about big employers that are fundamental drivers of the economy, especially in regional areas. By acknowledging them we ensure that they are in a better place from which to operate, which is a very sensible thing to do.

Alongside direct support for operators, we implemented the Good to Go tourism marketing campaign, which included Cairns, and a \$15 million aviation recovery program to facilitate travel to regional areas. As I have said many times in this chamber, I cannot stress strongly enough the importance of aviation, not just to regions such as Cairns. If we look at a busy year, about 2.8 million people travel and about 87 per cent of them use airplanes. Aviation is fundamental. International and domestic aviation are also crucial to the Whitsundays and the Gold Coast.

Aviation is absolutely fundamental to our state. Under this program we have leveraged Alliance Airlines to undertake a Sunshine Coast-Cairns route three times a week. These were just some of the support measures. They were very popular flights, well picked up by the industry.

Understanding how important tourism is to the Cairns region, the Premier, along with the minister for tourism, announced Labor's tourism policy in Far North Queensland. Our \$74 million plan, Rebuilding Queensland Tourism, continues the Palaszczuk government's record investment in our tourism industry by providing funding certainty for our tourism organisations to market Queensland to the world when the time comes. It is important to acknowledge that we are doing that now.

One of the great challenges at present is consumer confidence. In my short 56 years on this planet I have never seen consumer confidence so low. People will not book a holiday because they do not know whether they will get to the other end. I am not complaining about our policy of closing our borders—life comes first—however, it has presented enormous challenges, not only for the people of Cairns but also for the vast industry we have in this fantastic state. We are in a great position to rebuild it, but we need to slowly start doing that, and we are doing that.

The vaccine will roll out. There is no silver bullet. It will be a combination of federal, state and local governments working together and the people understanding the intricacies of what we need to do. We are slowly starting to rebuild and getting to the stage of moving out of it. Today I spoke to

operators on the Gold Coast, in the Whitsundays and in Cairns. Hotels are slowly starting to see good booking numbers come through as a result of what the government has inspired. We are also seeing very early green shoots in business sector travel. That is an important factor. If we have another outbreak, that could be put in jeopardy. I accept that; we have to accept that. This is the real world and we need to acknowledge that. We are getting better with our contact tracing. People have a better understanding, so we are moving forward.

Last Friday I had a great opportunity in my role as assistant minister to go to Townsville. You do not hear people in Cairns saying that often, but it was lovely to go down to Townsville.

**A government member** interjected.

**Mr HEALY:** I must say to the member that it was a beautiful experience. I met with a wide range of tourism operators there—day-touring products and hotels. Their occupancy rates are looking very solid and things are coming back. If you look at the demographics and how Townsville's market works compared with Cairns and how Cairns's market works compared with the Whitsundays, you see that there is a disparity. The beauty is in acknowledging that. We, the minister and certainly the Premier acknowledge those things. We are moving in the right direction and we are seeing consumer confidence slowly pick up.

The Wangetti Trail project is underway. It is a 94-kilometre trail. When tourism rebounds, that trail will be a game changer. It is unheard of anywhere else in the world. A mate of mine is a surgeon in Cairns and he told me that 94 doctors went over to New Zealand two years ago to go mountain biking. Mountain biking is huge. They are making a lot of money in the States. In areas where people used to go skiing, now people are mountain biking. It is the same thing in Jindabyne and places like that. This is the new tourism. We need to be aware—and we are aware—and we are moving into and investing in those areas.

**Mr Hinchliffe:** Not much snow in Cairns.

**Mr HEALY:** No snow in Cairns; correct. The reality is that we are moving towards new products and building these new activities that will capitalise on a new and emerging market. This includes continuing the work in our education sector. We have two universities and six English language colleges. That enables not only our tourism industry but also our agricultural producers to have access to a significant bank of labour. We do not have that at the moment. We are seeing what is happening. The minister and I have had a vast number of meetings with people in the last months. We acknowledge that the federal government is doing something with the Pacific Solution in relation to agriculture. There are challenges in a few areas, but we are aware of that. That is an area where we need to continue to grow to make sure we get students back. It is a multibillion dollar industry not only for Cairns but also for Queensland as a whole. When recovery happens, we need to make sure our representatives in the federal government are very aware that we are also very keen to get the students back not only in Cairns but also across the state.

As I said earlier, we cannot rely on tourism as our only industry. We need to rebuild tourism, and we will. There are a lot of very positive things. We also need to look at what we are doing to build new industries and create new career opportunities. When looking at where we have been allocating money—I acknowledge the Treasurer because when he was the minister for state development this is an initiative he was very keen on—the Cairns marine precinct reeks of opportunity. We are investing \$30 million to expand the facilities there which will enable our marine precinct to cater for the maintenance of more vessels. I accept that the federal government made changes to the coastal shipping act which allows for more whiteboats to come in. We are seeing it happen. It is a growing industry and we are facilitating that. Cairns has a huge opportunity to capitalise on that. As I said, we are investing \$30 million. We will have two jetties—one 75 metres and the other 100 metres—where we will be able to see and provide more work, which will be absolutely fantastic. We are working with Ports North to capitalise on this competitive edge. We are also seeing a few changes taking place in that marine precinct area. Cairns will be able to play a leading role in boosting Australia's naval capacity and preparedness. The precinct will elevate Queensland's status as a hub for large vessel technical repairs in the Southern Hemisphere. Our goal is to continue to grow that.

As we know, Cairns is poised to lead Australia's maritime sector. Norship marine, which is based in Cairns, has a 70-year pedigree in advanced maritime engineering and repair services, with clients ranging from defence to tourism, fishing and the resources sector. Through our Made in Queensland program we helped Norship obtain equipment that designs ship components as part of complex maintenance work. With this technology, Norship are now able to secure larger contracts. This is terrific. Norship has recently been sold in the Varley Group, a 100-year-old company operating out of Newcastle, Sydney, Perth—now operating everywhere. I had the pleasure of meeting their chairman

and managing director recently. He has made their intentions very clear, and that is to expand. The shipbuilding opportunity is significant. We have a lot happening in that space. I think there will be a lot of very positive announcements. The key is to recognise what we need. A lot of people stand around and complain that they do not know what to do. This is an area where we will continue to invest and expand.

The Cairns region produces some of the best natural produce in the world. We boast world-class seafood, avocados, mangoes, melons, blueberries, citrus and vegetables. I have lobbied for our city to be the gateway for this produce to the Asian market. Admittedly, we have had a few challenges getting planes to go anywhere, but we know that in that market there is a growing middle class and they are hungry for quality Australian produce. I touched on this in my maiden speech. I was very pleased to announce that Cairns will be one of two regional distribution centres in Queensland, thanks to a multimillion dollar investment by the Palaszczuk government. Air Freight Handling Services is proposing to expand their facility located at Cairns Airport. A 3,400-square-metre facility will provide farmers with rapid access to freight. This means that farmers can transport food that is fresher and sell at higher values. This will supercharge our agriculture sector and support more jobs in and around Cairns. One in every five dollars of Australian imports and exports travel via an airport. The importance of airports, as I said earlier, can never be underestimated. Our proximity to the Asia-Pacific region, particularly Cairns, puts us in a unique and competitive position to take our food to market.

I would like to talk a little bit more about roads—we are building them everywhere—but the minister has left the chamber so I will talk about the JCU Ideas Lab. Another piece of the economic puzzle is innovation. Through Advance Queensland we are providing funding to innovative projects in Cairns to create jobs with export opportunities. Through a \$10 million commitment, Labor is proud to have supported the James Cook University Ideas Lab.

We are seeing significant investment in our roads. It is vital we continue to progress our major infrastructure that is building Cairns and our region and is keeping locals in jobs. It is vital that we build the essential infrastructure that a growing city and region needs. I am proud to announce that the Palaszczuk government has delivered more than \$1.8 million in road and transport upgrades in and around Cairns. This includes works packages along the Captain Cook Highway and Ray Jones Drive and will mean more lanes and the upgrading of the intersection. This is backing over 1,000 local jobs. We do not need to provide any examples to show that this government is absolutely focused on jobs.

I cannot say strongly enough that we are investing significant amounts in education. We know that the future of our country, state and city is in the classroom. They should be at home doing their homework about now. We have seen investment of over \$500,000 in the Cairns Freshwater Christian College, \$20,000 in the Cairns Community Kindergarten, \$11 million in the expansion of a very important multipurpose hall at Cairns State High School and \$1 million in Trinity Bay State High School for the refurbishment of industrial technology and design facilities. The list goes on.

Just as importantly, I want to talk about TAFE. I congratulate TAFE on picking up a \$36 million contract for the training and support of Navy crews of the Guardian class patrol boats. This is fantastic work. That is an example of the growing opportunities for our city and region in marine industries.

There are a number of other issues involving sport. The arts is a very important sector. We continue to invest in the arts. We have so many Indigenous players in my area, whether it be in theatre, art or a wide range of other activities. We continue to invest and acknowledge the importance they play in the arts sector. We have been assisting the JUTE Theatre Co. We have also been assisting the Cairns Regional Council with the arts.

I will finish by talking about our hospital. We continue to invest hundreds of millions of dollars into the hospital. What is vitally important to the hospital is the scoping document that is well and truly underway. It will look at the detail around the expansion to university hospital status. There has been the expansion of our cardiac service. We have completed the scoping document for the Cairns Health and Innovation Centre. Some \$3.8 million has been allocated to the emergency department for more doctors.

I am extremely proud to be the representative of the people of Cairns. I will continue to advocate and push hard for them.