




Speech By  
**Hon. Amanda Stoker**

**MEMBER FOR OODGEROO**

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**MAIDEN SPEECH**

 **Hon. AJ STOKER** (Oodgeroo—LNP) (4.16 pm): It is such a privilege to serve in this place and to carry with me the hopes and ambitions of the people of Cleveland, Ormiston, Wellington Point, North Stradbroke Island and parts of Thornlands and Birkdale. The electorate might be called Oodgeroo, but we tend to think of ourselves as Redlanders. It is such a special thing to be welcomed into their homes, entrusted with their problems and anxieties and asked to represent their hopes for a better life.

It is also an honour to stand in this place to thank the former member, Dr Mark Robinson, for his service. It is nice to do it not from the opposition benches but from the side of the House where we as a government can deliver more than ever. I endeavour to approach it with an ethic of service and heart always for the people of my community.

I am so pleased to be part of a government that represents a fresh start for Queensland. It is my hope and belief that it will be a values-led, commonsense government committed to some fundamental truths: that a smaller government makes people freer and more prosperous; that the initiative of the individual is something to foster and grow and that individuals must take responsibility for their actions; that freedom to speak, worship, think and associate are vital to human flourishing because they are what equip a society to solve its problems; that enterprise is something to be encouraged because it is what provides a path to prosperity for people from all walks of life; that family is where the magic happens as we grow and age in good times and in bad and a place where the hard problems of life are solved; that human dignity matters at every age and stage; that the measure of a society is how it treats those who cannot advocate for themselves; that our best days are ahead of us; and that we can make Queensland again be a state where anyone can, with hard work, make a great life, a place where things get built and stuff gets done again. These values are the thread that is woven through everything I hope to do in this place, and they are the reason I am so confident this LNP government will make life better for you.

I have had the honour of serving as a representative of Queensland in the Senate, so in a sense I have already had a maiden speech. Rather than tell my story again, I would prefer to use this opportunity to address the most pressing problems facing Redlanders and Queenslanders: the rising cost of living and the erosion of their standard of living and quality of life. There is nothing more iconic than an ice cream on Cylinder Beach on beautiful Straddie. For over 40 years, parents and grandparents have made it a ritual to buy one for their kids as they sit on the sand after a day of swimming and sandcastles, perhaps whilst watching a pod of whales arch past. For Deb and her family, selling that ice cream was their livelihood, without incident, but now it is not allowed. It seems like a joke—and I wish it was—that safety concerns were cited as the reason. You might be wondering whether you have missed the media coverage of the dangers of selling or indeed eating ice cream on the beach, but there have been no safety incidents—only incidents of bureaucratic creep. The only casualty at the beach has been this family's livelihood and fun times for Straddie kids. This kind of madness is playing out in ways big and small right across Queensland and it is costing us more than lost good times.

I will give you another example. A few weeks ago I got a call from the owner of the seafood store on Straddie. His practice for decades has been to occasionally collect a bucket of sea water from the ocean in which to defrost prawns on the days when the catch is light. There is no better way to do it and it has never before been a problem, but now rangers tell him that taking sea water in any quantity, however small and whatever the purpose in doing so, requires an application form and a decision to grant him a permit because it is taking a natural resource and doing so without a permit will result in an on-the-spot fine of \$806—for a bucket of saltwater from the ocean. There is zero environmental harm. By this logic, every toddler who takes home a little bucket of sand would need a permit for their fun.

Maybe it is just one public servant overreaching, but the cost is real and that cost either gets passed onto the person who wants to buy their seafood or erodes the already slim margins of the small business owner until there is nothing left but to close the doors. I will be working to address these issues as a member of the LNP Crisafulli team—cutting the burden of regulation that is impeding businesses and costing consumers every day.

Right now as I look across my community I see much work to do. The LNP team have a mandate to make a difference in the areas that are causing Queenslanders pain, and I am confident that the steps we are taking will make a difference. We are delivering a safer community, taking action to end the housing crisis and ensuring health services that can be relied upon, including at Redland Hospital. It is the need for a stronger economy and action on the cost of living that is often hidden in the complexity of people's daily struggles which I am determined to work on with our very capable Treasurer to make a difference.

Since 2019 we have had the sharpest decline in purchasing power in the OECD. Ours went backwards by two per cent, while the rest of the OECD went forwards by 7.7 per cent. That is despite the fact that the percentage of working people with the right to collectively bargain is almost double the OECD average and the highest of any English-speaking country. Productivity is not just a catchphrase from people who want you to work harder; rather, it is the key to making our society prosperous again, dragging it out of the malaise caused by ill-disciplined governments' inflationary policies and misplaced priorities, restoring your purchasing power and the sense that you have a real chance to get ahead.

Productivity is allowing people to flourish using their skills to their highest and greatest purpose. For example, when a police officer is recruited from interstate, Labor policies would have a detective with 15 to 20 years of experience go back almost to the very beginning—their skills benched and a community unable to be fully protected by them. The failure of Labor to tackle this decline is the reason for so much of the pain I see across my electorate. National productivity is down to 2016 levels and real disposable incomes are down by more than 10 per cent. If you feel like things are hard, you are not imagining it. It shows up as families who feel maxed out by their mortgages because the combined impact of high property prices and substantial interest rates is a double whammy, but being a renter does not feel like a more viable option when there are so few properties on offer.

It is not helped when governments have done all they can to disincentivise mum-and-dad property investors and treat them as though they are some sort of greedy landlords. In truth, they are being squeezed by heavy regulation, rampant inflation and rising taxes too. People are being smashed by the failure of the former government to plan for supply, the imposition of public procurement policies designed to push up prices across the market and the imposition of every imaginable reason to stop work and ever-higher standards of construction decimating productivity that Labor would again dress up as some form of protection for the community. It has made the cost of building a home rise by \$100,000 in just four years.

Instead of working with the property industry to get the homes people need into the market, those opposite chose to demonise it as corrupt. I think of the impact on people like Caroline from Cleveland. At the age of 80 she has been forced to take in roommates. Even though the behaviour of these strangers makes her feel unsafe in her home, rent on her townhouse is \$740 a week and her pension just does not stretch that far. She applied for public housing but was told that she faces a 10-year wait. If she lives to a life of the average age, she simply will not live to see it. She is a capable woman, driven to despair by the indignity of the prospect of homelessness and fear for her safety now even in her own home.

Productivity does not just mean getting the government to build more public housing—though more is needed. It means clearing the blocks to private enterprise being able to do it in greater number and scale and for a better price than any centrally controlled government program ever could. I grew up around the construction industry. I am proudly a plumber's daughter. My sister and I spent a lot of our childhood building things out of the boxes and timber around the site while Dad would do a rough-in. However, at present, businesses in trades—and across the industries of the Redlands—simply cannot get the staff they need. Based on current policies, it is estimated that the working population of

the Redlands is currently at the highest level it will be for the next 30 years, and there is already a skills shortage. It presents an existential problem for our community. They cannot get staff to move to work in the Redlands largely due to the unaffordability of housing. Businesses tell me that they advertise for staff but when they make an offer it ends up being declined because the person either could not find a home in which to live or could not afford those that were available.

For there to be more and ever-better jobs in our region, and the democratic diversity needed for the long term, we need our businesses to thrive and that means that staff need places to live. It will also take a committed program of matching Queensland's training offering to the needs of industry, fast-tracking that wherever possible using both public and private education providers, and in doing so offering secure and well-paying jobs to young people and indeed all people from all walks of life. I am very much looking forward to assisting Minister Ros Bates to do just that.

In many ways though the challenges faced by the Redlands are reflected right across the state. The failures of the previous government in places far and wide have a direct impact on the quality of life and living standards experienced by people living in Oodgeroo. Their energy bills are too high, driven up by incompetence in the management at places like the Callide power plant. When those opposite demanded dividends from this publicly owned corporation to the tune of 80 per cent of its operating profit to prop up the failing state budget, it stripped the company of its ability to afford a proper maintenance schedule. Is it any wonder that it exploded? Labor has been more concerned with mastering media spin than mastering the job of good governance, but now the absence of that base load supply in the energy market means we all pay more. I am so delighted to see the LNP introduce a maintenance guarantee. Labor's incompetence raises the cost of production, making us less competitive, making us less desirable as a place to invest, and making all goods more expensive.

I wish I could say it were an isolated case. The Gladstone Port Corporation has, in the last 12 months, gone from having the best reputation with the coal industry on the east coast of this nation to having the very worst. Between July and December 2023, the uncommercial approach of those who run the Gladstone Port has had a catastrophic impact on Queensland's reputation as a place worth investing. It is a publicly owned port, so what goes on there is something for which the former Labor government must be held responsible. As the major mining industry port for Queensland, it should be working 24 hours a day, but during this period, because of a failure to staff it properly, it was lucky to have one eight-hour shift running a day. Management were not working the assets hard, and the ships were queuing at sea waiting to load Queensland coal, each of them incurring demurrage for the delay. Mines had to slow down their operations because they were becoming gridlocked by the blockage at the port.

The port's take-or-pay contracts meant miners had to pay up whether the port held up its end of the deal or not. In short, the port got the same fee whether it moved one million tonnes through the port or, say, six. Labor might think, 'Big deal. The people of Queensland got paid,' and maybe in the short term that is how it looked, but here is the kicker. An independent report commissioned by the port revealed that 4.4 million tonnes of loading opportunity was lost and that cost Queenslanders some \$200 million in royalties it did not earn as mines were forced to slow down their operations because goods could not get through the port. This is lost productivity not through the failure of works but through a failure of leadership. It reduces investment and means high-paying jobs go elsewhere. \$200 million in royalties gets you a lot of doctors, a lot of nurses or police officers. It is roads and bridges we will not get. It is debt that is not repaid. And all because the Queensland government owned enterprise was not running with an eye to being productive for us. They were not hungry to deliver for Queenslanders. In fact, they turned business away.

Let's call it what it is: it is incompetent and it costs Queenslanders—in the services we should be getting in the Redlands and across the state, in the debt we should not have to be paying and in the inflation in the cost of everything. Productivity matters, and an LNP government that respects your money will drive for it.

I could keep going about the reduced efficiency in getting our agricultural, manufacturing and mining product to market because of the chronic neglect of roads, about the crumbling state of too many bridges that are critical to getting produce to where it needs to be, but that is just the beginning. We must seize the opportunity that comes from competitive federalism to attract businesses from across the nation to a state that is open for business and hungry to thrive. We need a competitive market where the government is not sticking in its nose and playing favourites in the energy space or anywhere else, but instead lets the needs of buyers in the market do the talking. History shows us that governments are not very good at it. We must offer the stability, consistency and commonsense that makes Queensland a safe place to invest and a great place to live and work, where the emphasis moves away from social engineering to engineering for bridges and buildings, where merit is recognised and people are valued by the content of their character rather than merely on external attributes, where we focus

less on the grievance industry and more on growing the unique gifts and talents we each possess. After a decade of extreme identity politics and economic destruction hypocritically wrapped in the language of compassion and equity, there is much work to do.

You can see I am determined to do my bit to rebuild the economy of Queensland, providing a pathway to prosperity for people from all walks of life and making this state a place where things get done again—the budget balanced by projects going ahead, where things get built; a state that, after a decade of no is prepared to give the projects that offer a rising standard of living a responsible yes.

The benefits of a stronger economy across the state manifest in better opportunities and services locally as well as in every town across Queensland. It shows us a higher standard of living in a better quality of life, especially for those on the margins, and I am confident this LNP government can deliver it.

I would not be here without the kindness and hard work of many. I cannot possibly acknowledge them all, but I am thankful for everyone who contributed to the campaign in ways big and small. My campaign committee, so ably led by Chris Reeves, truly is the dream team. In all the years I have been helping on campaigns, I have not ever once worked with a better crew than this one. Robin, Josh, Vicki, Cheryl, Greg, Michael, Jack, Bob and our federal member, Henry Pike, and his wife, Kate—I am so thankful for you all.

I have had great mentors in my life without whom I am sure I would not have reached my potential. There are two in particular I wish to honour—Wendy Armstrong and Ian Callinan. I am thankful to my mum and dad, and to Narelle and Warren, my in-laws. To my family, you are my everything and I am so grateful for you. Adam, you are the best. There is nothing quite like having children, though, to motivate you to leave things better than when you found them. My family has sacrificed a lot for me to be here and I do not take it lightly.

Already in this place I have been advocating for things that matter to Oodgeroo—for the residents of Straddie to have fairness in the way their public transport is priced, the connectivity they crave, and for Redland Hospital to be resourced to become reliable, trusted and a great place to work. I will be strong and consistent in my advocacy until our nurses and orderlies have safe and affordable parking, until our schools have the long overdue investment needed to create an environment in which every child is ready to learn, until our police have the tools they need to keep us safe, and our sporting clubs have the facilities they need to turn at-risk kids into valued members of our community.

Together, we will build a Queensland that is prosperous and free, liberating each individual to pursue their unique goals and gifts and unleashing them for the common good, where communities are safe and families are strong, where every Queenslanders can learn, grow and invest with the confidence of a responsible and stable government, and the knowledge that our best days are well and truly ahead of us. We will be a state that gets stuff done again, and it will show in the high standard of living and quality of life experienced by each and every one of us.