



Speech by

**DESLEY BOYLE**

**MEMBER FOR CAIRNS**

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#### **FIRST SPEECH**

**Ms BOYLE** (Cairns—ALP) (3.07 p.m.): I am pleased, proud and, most of all, privileged to speak for the first time in this House as the member for Cairns. I extend my congratulations to all honourable members of this House on their election and re-election. Through you, Mr Deputy Speaker, I extend my congratulations to Mr Speaker on his election to that high office and my unequivocal support in assisting him to carry out the responsibilities of upholding the finest principles of our social democratic traditions.

Though over a month has passed since the election, I find that I am still frequently filled with amazement at my good fortune in having reached a position of such importance and privilege as that of the member for Cairns. It is appropriate at this time to recall the proud history of the Labor Party in the seat of Cairns. It has been held by the Labor Party since 1904, with the exception of several years during the 1940s when it was held by a Labor Independent. It was therefore, with cause, a significant celebration for the party in Cairns that I, as the Labor candidate, was elected on 13 June to continue this extraordinary mandate.

I am conscious of the high quality of representation given Cairns by my immediate predecessors. Ray Jones served from 1965 to 1983. Truly a man of the people and a gentleman, he worked tirelessly over all those years, despite the then even greater exigencies arising through the distance of Cairns from the seat of Government. I recognise again his very considerable contribution, and I thank him for his continuing support.

My immediate predecessor as member for Cairns, Keith De Lacy, has indeed set high standards for me to follow. He served from 1983 until this year. He successfully promoted the needs of Cairns across all sectors of Government and gave strong leadership to the State of Queensland as Treasurer from 1989 to 1996. Mr De Lacy's approach on all matters was considered and intelligent. He is widely respected as a man of integrity. I could not be more fortunate in having his support and guidance, particularly in this early period of the 49th Parliament.

I am the first woman to be elected as the member for Cairns. This is a matter of some pride for me, though, more than anything, it is a sign of the times and of the progress that women are making in society. It is noteworthy that at no stage during the election campaign was my gender, or the gender of the other candidates, raised as an issue. My congratulations to the other women elected to this Parliament, numbering as we now do around 18% of the complement of members. I hope Keith De Lacy's comment in his 1983, as it was then termed, "maiden speech" will prove true that women "will bring their own distinctive character to this House and perhaps raise the tone somewhat".

I wish also to recognise and thank the large number of people who assisted and supported me during the campaign and on polling day. I thank the members of the campaign committee, those who worked so hard in the office, members of branches in the Cairns area, polling booth workers, scrutineers, and many others who made financial and other contributions large and small. Together, though not on our own, we won this election. We were underlined, one might say, by the positive policies of the Queensland Labor Party and the leadership and energy of Peter Beattie and the team which is now the Cabinet of the Labor Government. At the personal level I know how impossible my success would have been without the encouragement, support and love freely given me by my mother, my brothers and, especially, my children.

I turn now to my favourite topic: Cairns. It had a population of only 27,000 people when Ray Jones commenced his service in the Parliament, a population of 65,000 when Keith De Lacy was first elected and now the resident population is 110,000. Cairns is a rapidly growing regional city in the tropics endowed with a natural environment that, even for the locals, still takes one's breath away. Cairns is the only city closely bordered by two World Heritage areas: the Great Barrier Reef and the Wet Tropics rainforest. These provide natural advantages for the health and lifestyle of the people. Mindful of their importance also as international assets, Cairns bears a responsibility to protect and manage them wisely. There has been an exponential increase in visitors to the region since the early eighties. Visitors were attracted initially and still are substantively by those environmental features.

Subsequently Cairns has become, disproportionately to its size, internationally famous. This is both an advantage and a disadvantage. The over one million visitors each year, the international and sometimes sensationalised media attention and the periods of rapid and uneven development have all contributed to uneven ebbs and flows in the prosperity and wellbeing of the resident community. Nonetheless, the importance to the Cairns economy of our continuing to be well positioned in international tourism is undeniable. The immediate and substantial support that Premier Peter Beattie has already demonstrated in his first month of Government has been widely welcomed in the far north. Our tourism marketing is being reoriented towards Europe and the United States. At the same time, however, we are pleased with the Premier's clear recognition of the importance of maintaining and confirming our links with the countries of Asia. Visitors from around Queensland and from around the rest of Australia are just as valued, not only for their contribution to the tourist economy but also because they provide for us in Cairns a connection with other parts of our nation and allow us to share and showcase our region. They contribute to what must never be lost, that indefinable but essential element that keeps Cairns proudly Australian.

Cairns is, however, much more than a tourism destination. It is also a city that provides goods and services to the region of the near Pacific, the Cape York Peninsula, the Atherton Tableland and the coast of far-north Queensland. The dependence of Cairns on the prosperity of its surrounding areas gives me an imperative to work with my neighbouring elected members towards promoting the development and stability of the broader region of far-north Queensland. In this connection, I give recognition to the importance of sugar and other agricultural, mining, fishing and marine-based industries in the far north. Cairns' involvement in international, national and regional activities has sometimes led residents of Cairns to feel overrun by externalities. For the future of Cairns, it is important that the local people are given a strong voice in decision making and direction setting, not least so far as Government activity is concerned. The time is now right to implement Labor's policy which recognises Cairns as a city in its own right. Labor's commitment that, from now, State Government departments and agencies in Cairns will be self-managed and will communicate with and report directly to Brisbane is essential and reflects the city's growing maturity as well as its significant contribution to the State of Queensland.

The Labor Government's focus on jobs and job security is welcomed widely in Cairns, though there are some, unfortunately, who prefer to criticise Labor's target rather than contribute their own efforts towards that worthy goal. Although the estimated unemployment rate in Cairns is less than in some other centres, the casualisation of the workforce is a serious problem preventing, as it does, those in need of a full and steady income from establishing homes, families and a future. One worrying trend is that, while the gross regional product has risen steadily over the last decade, wages and salaries have declined as a proportion of GRP. That lower regional wage and salary structure is probably a contributing factor to the higher-than-average percentage of residents who wish to participate in the work force. Presently there is a serious problem of underemployment—people who have the capability and the wish to be productive but who are not afforded the opportunity. I make the commitment to work with the Government and the private sector to find innovative, modern and effective solutions to employment-related problems. Health and community issues will take a high priority in my work plan alongside the extension of employment, recreational and sporting opportunities for young people, for people with disabilities and for the elderly of the community. However, in the Cairns electorate no single project matters more than the completion of the redevelopment of the Cairns Hospital. It was first mooted in 1989. The process has been long and difficult. It is essential and right and proper that the funds necessary to fully complete the redevelopment of the Cairns Hospital be provided.

While we may wish it were not so, it is true that the city centre of Cairns is at this time in some difficulty. What is required is a redefinition of the style and functions of the city centre—of the ambience, of the sense of place as the heart of Cairns. The city centre will be revitalised as a vibrant residential, recreational, business and shopping precinct with a wide choice of cultural and entertainment options and international restaurants and eateries that will make lingering on the weekends and in the balmy evenings in the City of Cairns irresistible. Practical assistance will come from Labor's commitment of \$10m to the revitalisation program and to the integration of the city with its Esplanade and the port of Cairns. Additional commitments have been made to the expansion of the Cairns Convention Centre,

the establishment of a basketball stadium and associated sporting facilities as well as support for the council's redevelopment proposal for the Esplanade.

In the education sector it is important to engender better links between high schools and tertiary education options and between high schools and workplaces. Also required is stabilisation of the important role of the Institute of Technical and Further Education and recognition given to the growing partnership being forged between the institute and the Cairns campus of the James Cook University, which will result in better and wider education choices for residents of all ages. The export of education services is one of the growing elements of the Cairns economy and promises much for the future. The Labor Government will, I am sure, be called on to assist private educational facilities and, in particular, an international university wishing to establish in the Cairns area.

Cairns is well placed in having a strategic economic development plan and in having begun its implementation. As well as the recently formed Cairns Region Economic Development Corporation, there is a network of active business and subregional development organisations. Already, many have expressed their commitment to working in partnership with this Government through the new Department of State Development and Trade.

However, it should not be forgotten that Cairns is a small-business town. Very many businesses employ fewer than five people. A good rule of thumb for sound economic development is to ensure the retention and strengthening of existing businesses. Therefore, Cairns will look to the new department for on-the-ground, practical action in support of small business in balance with its role in developing export opportunities and enticing new businesses to the region.

In all this, what matters most is people. We are fortunate in Cairns to have a long history of multiculturalism—one that goes back a long time before the word itself came into common usage. We in the north are proud of our diverse heritage. We are proud, too, that the region of far-north Queensland is home to the largest proportion of the State's indigenous peoples. We support reconciliation and negotiated solutions, preferring to avoid legal or political redress where possible. I look forward to working closely with the many active indigenous leaders and organisations towards further reducing the historical disadvantage of their people and towards a full and healthy participation by the indigenous children of today in the future both of Cairns and the State.

One thing I must say about the people of Cairns, whatever their cultural background, is that they are a demanding lot who have a history of working hard, of pioneering, of volunteering where people are in need or when crises arise, of independence, and of a healthy scepticism of southern-based authorities. They will not allow me an easy ride as their member, although they will make the job easier by keeping me fully aware of their wishes, opinions, projects and best suggestions for the prosperity and health of the community. Should I lapse in listening, I have no doubt that they will repeat their messages or raise their tones if necessary.

One message sent by many electors who did not vote for the major parties was that they feel run over by politicians who seem to care more for economic rationalist arguments about money than for the people of their electorates. People who are doing their best to have a go, to work, to keep a home and family together and to look to a brighter future feel that, instead, life is getting harder with change after change being thrust upon them and with no end in sight. Although many of the changes are the outcome of complex social and technological imperatives beyond the scope of this Parliament to control, the message is clear. People expect their representatives to understand, to care, to speak for them and to be seen to do all that can reasonably be done when ill health, injustice or tragedy strikes.

However, this is a distinctly different message from that which was sent by some members of this House in their first speeches. Far from the politics of reason and representation, instead we heard the politics of anger. The politics of anger is indulgent, dangerous and divisive. It is indulgent because it is easy to rage and rant, to criticise and blame, to accuse of conspiracy, and to rail against whatever is and against that which actually is not but is fantasised to be so. It is dangerous because it creates an illusion of fighting the system. It grabs media attention. It courts, although in the end it will not satisfy, those drawn to it by vulnerability or disappointment. It is divisive because, behind a mask of unity, it emphasises extremes, it separates, it pulls apart, and it pits Queenslanders against Queenslanders, Australians against Australians.

How much harder is the politics of reason and representation. How much harder it is to take the time and make the effort to understand, to analyse, to balance diverse and differing opinions, to search for wiser solutions, to initiate, to persevere and to actually make changes by deliberate decision and concerted action. Harder it may be, but the politics of reason and representation is the proper and responsible course and the one that I will follow as I grow in knowledge and experience.

As this opportunity to speak draws to a close, I pledge my loyalty to the State and to its institutions and values. I pledge to speak in this House in the right and proper manner. I pledge not to abuse or use irresponsibly the privilege of my position. I pledge to the people of Cairns strong representation regardless of political affiliation. I pledge hard work, active participation in community life,

accessibility, practical action and a determination to assist the other honourable members of this House, particularly those holding ministerial positions, to be cognisant of the particular needs of Cairns. I am proud to be a member of the Labor Government, having as I do such respect for the qualities of the Premier, Peter Beattie, and for his team of Ministers.

Lastly, and yet still foremost in my mind, I express my sincere appreciation to the people of Cairns who have elected me as their representative. I will seek to honour their faith and confidence in me and to consider their wellbeing now and in the future above all else.

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