



Speech By
Craig Crawford

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

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MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Mr CRAWFORD** (Barron River—ALP) (4.27 pm): Thank you for the opportunity to speak for the first time in the 55th Parliament, Mr Deputy Speaker. I come to the 55th Parliament from Far North Queensland from the electorate of Barron River, from the northern beaches of Cairns and the rainforest village of Kuranda, an electorate wedged between two remarkable World Heritage areas of the Great Barrier Reef on one side and the World Heritage rainforest on the other. I am blessed. I would not trade the Barron River electorate with anyone in the House. I am very proud of my patch.

Most members will have visited the electorate on business or for pleasure as Barron River includes not only the Cairns International Airport but also the popular tourist destinations of Palm Cove, Trinity Beach and Kuranda. Barron River boasts some of the highest tourism employment statistics in Queensland. In fact, all around the electorate you will see bumper stickers saying 'I love airline noise' or 'Tourism drives this car'. Barron River is a tourist electorate: an international airport with room to expand, a gateway to Australia from the far north, the tourism drawcards of Palm Cove, Trinity Beach, the Sky Rail, the train to Kuranda, bungee jumping, reef trips, skydiving—the list goes on and on.

There are many promising projects and ideas on the horizon for tourism in the far north. The growing Asian market is now showing early strong numbers. There are a great deal of opportunities in front of us as a government, as a region of the far north and, of course, in my electorate. The proposed \$8 billion Aquis development rests firmly in the centre of the Barron River electorate. I have faith in our cabinet to ensure that, for the people of Barron River, this project is managed in the best interests of all so that we may all prosper and grow.

For me, the road to politics began as a child growing up on the land in Victoria on a dairy farm with my parents, Daryl and Val Crawford, who not only taught me the fundamental values of right and wrong but also showed me many of the values that country people possess—values such as saying hello to a stranger, always helping out someone when they are in need and respecting the rules and laws of government. They taught me how to talk, not just in general but, as farmers do, to neighbours over the back fence, sometimes for hours at a time. My sister, Robyn, and I were fortunate in our upbringing. It is those values and principles that I carry with me today. I am proud to say that I was raised on the land.

Leaving the land as a young man, I experienced the world of employment, working for business and companies. I learned what it was like to be an employee: sometimes good, sometimes bad. I learned that shiftwork is hard on the body and the brain, and I will touch on that a bit later. My next ventures had me engaged in business not as an employee but this time as an owner, an employer, seeing the same issues from the other side. Small business is a hard game. I purchased a small shop and began to learn the trade of a locksmith. For six years I worked, sometimes thriving, sometimes struggling to make ends meet. Small business is a rough world and often your business relies purely

on the economy around you and whether the foot traffic passing your door are worried about their immediate future or whether they are happy to part with a few dollars in your store.

Between the years of 1987 and 2008 I served as a volunteer firefighter with the Country Fire Authority in Victoria. As I said, it was purely voluntary. I rose through the ranks of this fine organisation until I was a leader, a captain of a busy country Victorian fire brigade at Colac, which has a population of some 10,000 to 15,000 people. I led that brigade, including its 70 volunteers and four fire appliances, through close to 1,000 triple 0 calls for assistance. A fire brigade is much like a parliament; its roots stem back to England and the 1800s, its traditions much the same. Fine architecture, old books, brass and polished timber are nothing new to me.

I have been burnt. I have pulled an unconscious man from a burning house only to get myself trapped in that same house in an incident a few hours later which almost cost me my life. Burnt and dazed, I managed to escape with my colleague in extreme heat and confusion. The following day I was again injured in a similar situation, this time being stabbed with a large shard of glass. I am thankful the third incident never came. Protocol and tradition are things I cherish, things I yearn to maintain and things I will always fight to retain. However, I do agree that sometimes protocol and tradition must cater for modern times.

During my time as a volunteer firefighter, I saw some horrendous things: scarred land from bushfires; devastation to cattle and farmers; the sight of strong men crying whilst shooting their injured stock; the shock and awe of road accidents; the smell of oil, petrol, diesel, rubber and plastic; the panic of house fires with residents standing on their lawns in pyjamas in the freezing cold of night as I arrived in the first fire appliance to take command; the look of hope on their face as I locked eyes with them. There is a certain look that only those in the House who have experienced it will know what I am referring to, be it from a child clutching a teddy bear to perhaps a phone ringing with the word 'mum' on the display sitting next to a deceased person in a car. This is my life.

Volunteer firefighters, auxiliary firefighters, career firefighters—whichever organisation they belong to, whether they are aviation, state, federal, private, government, rural, urban, plantation or based at sea—perform their work without fanfare, not for recognition and not for reward. It is their job or their hobby and for many it is both. They do it because they love it. It defines who they are.

It was during my service as a volunteer firefighter that I discovered the world of ambulance, and what a world it is. Recruited initially in a casual position in 1995 to assist the full-time ambulance officers at the time, I was lucky to be welcomed into a world that most of the population never get to see. A spark that began a full-time career for me five years later, which spanned another 15 years, starting in Geelong in Victoria and ending in Cairns in Queensland, it has made me what I am today. It defines me and who I am, it defines what I stand for, what I will fight for, what I will defend and what I will oppose—a special band of brothers and sisters who are truly on the front line. I miss it already—the camaraderie, the laughs, the adrenaline, the lifestyle.

The Queensland Ambulance Service is a fine organisation. Like the House we occupy, the QAS has many fine traditions and history stemming back to England. Many of the earlier ambulance bearers came from orderlies at hospitals. Some were policemen, some were boiler operators at hospitals. Some were paid extra and some did the task expecting no reward or payment. They did it because of their own self-imposed duty to their neighbours, their towns and their communities. Over time the QAS, like other ambulance services, evolved. The training increased. What was once a half-day training session became a few weeks and then months and then years. The equipment increased in not only its quantity but also its quality.

The expectation of operating as an ambulance bearer changed so much that they were renamed ambulance officers and, more recently, in the last 10 years they have become known as ambulance paramedics. If one wants to insult a paramedic, one needs only to refer to them as an ambulance bearer or an ambulance driver. This seems a simple statement, but many prominent members of the community still use these terms without, of course, realising it is potentially offensive to the very people they are trying to commend or speak highly of. Their positions are paramedics. They are very proud of that title. When people refer to them by that title, they grow a little bit with pride. Queensland paramedics work a 10- or a 12-hour shift. Normally, they work between four and eight days in a week, often rewarded with an equal amount of time off. Generally most like it. It affords them the opportunity to spend quality time with their families and also time on their designated response vehicles.

I will spare the House the graphic detail of what kind of work paramedics undertake as I am sure members have a degree of that insight, but I will share some simple points with the House. Whenever there is a body found, whether it is in a car, a house, in the bush or at a workplace, whenever a person dies of old age, disease, murder, accident or whatever, it will almost always be

paramedics who arrive first once the plea goes to triple 0. Whenever a child is found motionless in a pool and the parents run for the phone, it will be paramedics who first enter the property in an attempt to turn chaos into some degree of order and calmness. The look in the eyes of the family says it all as paramedics charge into the lounge room where a father lays motionless on the floor from a heart attack. If I only had a gold coin for each time I heard the phrase, 'Please help us.'

Our flight paramedics—and I must mention that my good friend and parliamentary colleague the member for Thuringowa is cut from this breed—risk their lives dangling from a wire under a helicopter trying to reach a container ship, a yacht, a bush clearing or a remote rooftop. Recently we have seen these paramedics pay extreme prices in New South Wales and in Queensland, be it by death or by permanent disability.

Not all cases that paramedics attend are life-and-death situations. In fact, unfortunately, over the last 15 years a great proportion have been residents who were using the services of triple 0 because they either do not understand it or they do not wish to comply with the service being used only in the case of emergency. Some of these cases, which I have been to myself, are for people who do not have money to purchase medication, for a script that a doctor may have written for them. Paramedics have spoken of times when people have lost the remote control for the television and used triple 0 as a source of remedy. Many are lonely and many are confused.

What has not changed is the type of person it takes to succeed mentally and physically as a front-line paramedic in today's society. In fact, a recent study from the *Medical Journal of Australia* shows that the risk of serious injury to Australian paramedics is more than seven times higher than the Australian average—seven times. The fatality rate for Australian paramedics is six times higher than for the average Australian worker. Let me emphasise that point. A paramedic in Queensland is six times more likely to die at work than the average Queenslanders. If there is one thing this House should have an agreement on, it is to reduce this figure to create a safer environment on our front lines.

Every two years one Australian paramedic dies at work and 30 are seriously injured in vehicle accidents. Ten Australian paramedics are seriously injured each year in assaults. Most alarmingly, the injury rate for paramedics is more than two times higher than it is for police. It pains me to know that our employees on the front line are being subjected to this degree of risk with injury, mental abuse and the ongoing personal heartache that comes from that. But if you go out there and ask them, they will say that they love it and they would not change their careers. They truly love their jobs and the reward that comes with the heartache—the adrenaline, the fun times, the experience. They mix the good and the bad. They wipe away their tears and they replace them with laughter. That is how they move on to the next job. I am proud to call myself one of them; I am proud to stand with them; I am proud to call them my comrades; and I am very humbled that they continue to call me one of theirs.

We cannot control the uncontrollable environment. As a government we cannot afford safe passage into every house, every darkened alleyway and every vehicle accident, but we cannot stand back and allow the numbers that I have mentioned to get worse. I fear, as I have watched the industry from the inside for 15 years, that these numbers will continue to grow. The front line of defence for the rights of paramedics in Queensland rests with the United Voice union. For years this union has defended individual paramedics and the whole cohort of paramedics and has represented, struggled and worked with governments and the QAS to increase safety and conditions for Queensland paramedics. As part of the United Voice union, a group of ambulance paramedics and communication operators form an executive body—a state council—who are the voices for more than 3,000 staff. For many years I, as well as my parliamentary colleague the member for Thuringowa, worked on this state council. We fought for wages and conditions, fatigue management solutions and the basic safety aspects that our front-line service requires. At times I wonder what the QAS would look like now and what those alarming numbers I mentioned before would look like if there was no state council and group who held the line of defence and continued to strive towards change.

It alarms me that, in this modern age, government employed front-line service workers such as paramedics, firefighters and nurses need to take their cause to the streets to campaign, march and wage war with the government of the day. In these modern times in the world we occupy, why do we have the most trusted professions turning to the streets to resolve their wages and conditions?

Shiftwork hurts the brain and it hurts the body. I anticipate that my life expectancy has been reduced by 10 years. But I am aware that the members of this House have had a snippet of shiftwork with late-night sittings and early starts, so I do not need to elaborate on that. Worldwide, studies on shiftworkers have shown decreased life expectancy and increased health risks such as diabetes, stress and heart attacks. We cannot take night shifts away from our emergency crews, we cannot deny the public those services in the wee hours of the morning and we cannot stop saving lives—but

what we can do is provide support services to these crews to assist them to cope with the burden of shiftwork and the pounding their minds and bodies take in the course of their jobs. Just a few strategies that could help are: enhanced education; the availability of healthy food which does not need to be eaten quickly in a moving vehicle; earlier retirement strategies to reduce the need to work into the mid-60s or later; a better plan to ensure staff feel valued and their mental state better monitored; access to physical training, equipment and services; and the removal of the distinct separation between management and crew.

I would like to acknowledge the people I met along the road to parliament: my friends and paramedic work colleagues who in 2012 first promoted the idea to me of a political career and then assisted me to reach the various levels required—campaigning, speaking, media and social media to name a few—the paramedics and firefighters who embraced the concept of having one of their own represent them in parliament. From a team of preselected Labor paramedics, along with the member for Thuringowa I was successful, but I want to give recognition to one of our group: the ALP candidate for Noosa, Mr Mark Denham, who was not successful in the election. I pay my respects to the member for Noosa for his success.

I would like to thank the hard workers in my electorate and the surrounding electorates and the key people who drove my campaign to success: Mr Neil Noble, my campaign manager and, in the later stages of the election, Ms Kelly McManus. With the guidance of the previous Barron River Labor members Steve Wettenhall and Dr Lesley Clark, who both served time in this House, strategic support and logical advice was always close by.

I offer thanks to one of my mentors, the Treasurer and member for Mulgrave, who in the north of the state for three years stood strong in his desire to see the ALP returned and who remained strong in his support and encouragement of members like me in the far north. The timing of the campaign in Far North Queensland was hot and it was humid—it was January. For all of us in the far north it posed personal challenges for myself and volunteers who, despite the heat and the humidity, continued doorknocking and campaigning.

I particularly want to acknowledge Gary Bullock and the team at United Voice, Mr John Oliver and Mr Jack Emeleus; the team at United Firefighters Union; the National Council of Ambulance Unions led by my good friend Steve McGhie in Melbourne, who has watched my political career prosper for nearly 15 years; and the Services Union and other unions in Queensland through the Queensland Council of Unions who supported me. I am a proud union member and I am proud in the cause. I believe in what unions provide to their members.

I say to my dedicated and supportive staff Andrew Talbot and Chris Rollason, who I am sure are tuned into this speech from the Barron River office, that without their assistance the last three months would have been difficult, to say the least, as I ease into my new role. I also would like to thank the team of ALP branch members, volunteers, workers, friends and colleagues whom I met along the road and who helped me in those hot and humid conditions that we endured during the campaign.

Finally, and most importantly, my partner and fiancée, Rosalie Walter, has joined me in the House today from the viewing area. She is a hardworking shiftworker with Jetstar. Our road here has not been easy. The challenges of entering politics are not only financial, but the changes to your household are immense. Only a dedicated partner and family can hang on through that journey.

We live in a beautiful location in the northern beaches suburb of Trinity Park. I am a handyman with many small projects on the go at one time. If any of you should visit my home, please bring a tool bag, a cordless drill and an hour of your time. Life for us got more difficult during the campaign because there was no time for us and no time for me to assist her with her needs, but she never complained. She was supportive, strong and always looking for something to do to help me.

I proposed to Rosalie in 2014, on the very day that I was preselected to run for parliament. After spending some time in this fine establishment and following a late-night conversation with one of the security staff as well as the member for Mirani, who just happened to wander by at the time, and finding they were both married at this fine precinct, we listened intently to the concept. I am pleased to announce that Rosalie and I will be married in this House in April 2016.