



Speech by

Andrew Cripps

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

Hansard Wednesday, 11 October 2006

MAIDEN SPEECH

Mr CRIPPS (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (3.35 pm): Mr Deputy Speaker, congratulations on your appointment to that position. Would you convey on my behalf my congratulations to the Speaker on his election to that high and respected office. Inasmuch as all of us here are conscious of the expectations of members of parliament in the community, the Speaker is particularly burdened with the responsibility of ensuring that the traditional impartiality and dignity of that office are preserved.

I would like to take this opportunity to pledge my loyalty to my constituents in the Hinchinbrook electorate, to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and to her representative in this great state of Queensland, Her Excellency the Governor. The Australian Federation has been served very well indeed by the Westminster system and our constitutional monarchy. Our current constitutional arrangements have served us well and I am a strong advocate for retaining these arrangements in the interests of good government.

I wish to offer my sincere thanks to a number of people who have assisted me greatly on the journey that has led me to this place. There are many. In the first instance, I would like to thank my party colleagues, both in the organisation and in the parliament. They have all, at various times, supported, encouraged, lectured and counselled me. Time does not permit me to list them all.

The next group I must sincerely thank are those special people who make up the branches and committees of the Nationals in the Hinchinbrook electorate itself. These people are very dedicated supporters of the party and have helped me enormously during the recent election campaign. Again, there are many but time is against me.

One special man who poured his heart and soul into the campaign and who has been a wonderful support to me and a loyal and faithful member of the Nationals from the Hinchinbrook electorate is Ignazio La Spina, or Nat as his friends and peers call him. Those who know Nat understand the commitment he has to the party and the passion he has for Hinchinbrook. I would like to acknowledge his contribution and thank him sincerely for his support.

Another man to whom I must pay tribute but who requires no introduction to the longer serving members of this House is my predecessor and mentor, the former member for Hinchinbrook, Marc Rowell. I met Marc when I was still a high school student. But even at that time I was interested in current and public affairs and took a keen interest in the 1998 Queensland state election. This was, of course, the election at which One Nation made its extraordinary electoral debut. It captured 11 seats in Queensland, including several in north Queensland.

However, it was a measure of the respect and the esteem in which the people of Hinchinbrook held Marc Rowell, as a fundamentally decent man and passionate advocate for his electorate, that even while every seat around him fell to One Nation the Nationals, through Marc, held Hinchinbrook. Indeed, Marc faced the people of the Hinchinbrook electorate on six separate occasions without being defeated, choosing, as we all know now, not to contest the most recent election. That Marc chose the time and manner in which he would leave the Queensland parliament is indicative of the measured and practical approach Marc had to public life. This was reflected in the tributes that were offered to him in this place

during the final sitting of this House before the last election from both opposition and government members.

I have a challenge in front of me to provide the level of quality representation to the Hinchinbrook electorate that Marc Rowell did over 17 years. Having worked with Marc for a period of time, I hope I have taken on board some of the fundamentals that will provide me with a sound basis to continue that standard. To Marc and his wonderful wife, Sandy, I am thankful for your support and guidance. I wish you all the very best in the next chapter of your lives.

My friends and family have always been the foundation blocks of my life. We are, each of us, nothing without those who love and care for us and we in return can only live limited lives if we do not love and care for them. My friends and family are my harshest critics and my sources of inspiration. To my parents, Lloyd and Lorraine, who are here in the gallery today, I wish to tell them how thankful I am for the support and opportunities I have had throughout my life. In return, they have asked only for a commitment to do my best. My parents have worked tremendously hard to give me and my brother every chance to receive a first-class education and to open as many doors as possible for us and our future. They have made many sacrifices and I owe them a great debt. I hope I can repay their faith and support. To my brother Graham, my best mate, of whom I am so very proud for the things he has achieved in his life already, thank you for your support. I am a lucky person to have such wonderful friends and family. While those were very personal comments, they reflect a much wider reality in our community that the family plays an integral role in our lives as we grow and develop as young people and as we take on more burdens and responsibilities as adults. The importance of the family as the fundamental unit of a strong society should never be taken for granted. Public policy can affect families in a variety of ways, and we ought to be conscious of our decisions insofar as the welfare of the family is concerned.

At this point I wish to turn to the character of the electorate that I have the privilege to represent in this place—the electorate of Hinchinbrook. Truly, this is God's own country. The Hinchinbrook electorate runs from its southern boundary at the Black River just north of Townsville to its northern boundary just south of the township of Innisfail. Nestled between the Great Dividing Range and the Coral Sea, the Hinchinbrook electorate is diverse and dynamic. We are a part of Queensland with great potential and many opportunities. Our great primary industries continue to underpin the economy of the Hinchinbrook electorate. The sugar, banana, cattle, horticultural and fishing industries create wealth and employment for the families of thousands. I recognise this undeniable fact and I have no hesitation in saying that I stand at the ready to defend them and to support them against any government or other organisation that would undermine their operations—that would try to take away their property rights which they have acquired in good faith, their right to farm, their right to fish and their right to provide for their families.

However, the economic base of the Hinchinbrook electorate is more diverse than agriculture. The tourism industry is well developed in my electorate and stands at the ready to continue to grow and make a contribution to this diversification. It boasts spectacular natural beauty, exciting attractions, areas of historical significance and wonderful people and cuisine. I look forward to encouraging and supporting the continued development of the tourism industry in my electorate. Just some of the unique locations that are a must-see in Hinchinbrook include the village of Paluma in the clouds; Wallaman Falls near Ingham; Lucinda and Cardwell, respectively the southern and northern gateways to the spectacular Hinchinbrook Island; world-class whitewater rafting on the mighty Tully River; days of relaxation at Mission Beach opposite Dunk Island; the rich history of farming towns like Silkwood and South Johnstone and popular tourist destinations such as Paronella Park. That means that there is something for everyone in the Hinchinbrook electorate.

The Hinchinbrook electorate is also fortunate to include the growing Northern Beaches area of Thuringowa city, including locations such as Black River, Yabulu, Saunders Beach, Purono Park, Bluewater, Toolakea, Toomulla, Rollingstone, Balgal Beach and Mystic Sands. These communities on the coast are blessed with beautiful beaches. The QNI nickel refinery at Yabulu is a major employer in the area. These communities have a strong local identity and they have become attractive to a broad range of people—from young families to retired couples but also those seeking a different lifestyle away from suburbia.

The Herbert River district where I live is a wonderful area with enormous potential. The various sectors of the sugar industry are the dominant economic interests, though cattle and tourism are successful complements. Ingham is renowned as the home of the annual Australian-Italian Festival, a unique cultural event held each year that celebrates the strong Italian and Sicilian traditions of hundreds of families who live in the Herbert River district. It is an award-winning festival that I strongly urge all members to attend. You will enjoy a wonderful experience including food, drinks and entertainment in the finest and most authentic Italian tradition.

The historic town of Cardwell, situated between the larger centres of Tully and Ingham, was established as one of the very first ports on the Queensland coast. Today it offers a wonderful lifestyle that is drawing new people from across Australia who are embracing what Cardwell has to offer. Port Hinchinbrook has offered an exciting opportunity to Cardwell, and I wish to offer my congratulations to

Keith Williams for his vision in relation to this project and for his determination to see the vision become a reality in the face of dogmatic opposition from previous federal and state Labor governments. It is a fine facility and a first-class tourism destination.

Also in Cardwell the Girringun Aboriginal Corporation has its offices and training facilities. I am lucky to have such a professional and proactive organisation representing a federation of nine Indigenous tribes within the Hinchinbrook electorate. Girringun has a strong reputation as an accountable and progressive Indigenous group with significant cultural expertise concerning the teachings and values of the Aboriginal people they represent and a determination to make these values relevant to the younger generation and the wider community. I value the strong relationship I have with Chairman Pastor John Andy and CEO Philip Rist. I look forward to continuing to work with them for the benefit of the Indigenous people in the Hinchinbrook electorate.

I was born and raised in the township of Tully, and I am very proud of it. I enjoyed a wonderful childhood in this small rural sugar and banana town. It is a wonderful community and I have a great affection for the people there. Tully is famous for experiencing the highest average annual rainfall in Australia of 4.27 metres a year and holds the record for the most rain in a calendar year in Australia, set in 1950 when 7.9 metres fell on the lush green rainforests and productive farmland of the Tully district. My education at St Clare's Catholic primary school and Tully State High School was a very happy time and I received first-class instruction and care from committed teachers and support staff.

Indeed, I am a strong supporter of small schools and rural and regional schools generally. These schools provide an excellent standard of education and our young people are in no way disadvantaged by attending these small schools unless we fail in our obligation to provide them with the support they deserve. The Hinchinbrook electorate has many schools—primary and secondary, state, Catholic and independent. As custodians of our young people, our schools are an important asset to the community and support for all of them, be they public or otherwise, ought to be readily forthcoming from this place.

North of Tully there are communities in the Hinchinbrook electorate such as El Arish, Silkwood, Kurrimine Beach, South Johnstone, Mena Creek, Moresby, Wangan and Mourilyan that have suffered particularly badly as a result of Tropical Cyclone Larry, which struck the far-north Queensland coast in the early hours of Monday morning, 20 March 2006. Time will prevent me from listing the heroes and heroines who saw those communities through the aftermath of Cyclone Larry and who have led the recovery effort since that time. There were many. The area is extraordinarily beautiful, tranquil and productive farming country with tight-knit communities that love living in north Queensland. Many lives were shattered on that day and the memory of Cyclone Larry will not readily fade from the minds of those who lived through it.

It is only right and proper that I place on record my sincere gratitude to the Queensland and Commonwealth governments for their generous support following Cyclone Larry. Party politics was put to one side and all members of parliament—state and federal—worked together to try to address the terrible misfortunes of the people of far-north Queensland affected by Cyclone Larry, and rightly so. The strong bipartisanship displayed during the recovery process was the only way that the community would have any chance of making a proper recovery. I am pleased to say that, while there is still a long way to go—and it is true that the circumstances of many are still of significant concern—we have come a long way and we have made substantial inroads into the rebuilding program. Those communities I have mentioned have maintained their optimism and their vibrancy and they have demonstrated that they will overcome this hurdle. They are fine Queenslanders.

At the age of 25, I am a relatively young person to be entering this place. Indeed, I am the youngest member of this the 52nd Queensland Parliament. Alas, I am no record breaker. My parliamentary colleague and friend the member for Southern Downs holds that distinction, and I suspect that his is a record that will stand for some time. Nevertheless, as I understand it, I am currently the youngest member of any Australian parliament—state, territory or federal. I am conscious of the added responsibility of being a representative of Queensland's young people in addition to being the voice of the people of the Hinchinbrook electorate. The Queensland parliament ought to reflect the wider Queensland community, and it is appropriate that young people have a voice in this place. Having said that, I am determined that that voice will be a thoughtful and constructive contribution in the best interests of the community as a whole, as young people are part of it and not separate from it.

I have touched on the importance of education for our young people, but I have another concern relating to our youth. I have observed my generation and subsequent generations increasingly becoming a drive-through, log-on generation where if they cannot get it by driving through to pick it up or logging on to download it, they do not want it because it takes too long. That is not true for everyone. A lot of young people are making great achievements and making great contributions, but the trend is contributing to the steady decline in the number of young people involved in community groups, service clubs, volunteer organisations and some sporting clubs.

The importance of participation in and service to your community is something that I believe in strongly. I think it is important that more people, especially young people, learn about the reward and satisfaction that is gained through working towards something that may not be of benefit to you in the short

term, or may not even benefit you at all, but which strengthens and enhances the community in which you live, work and raise your family. I sincerely hope that my contributions in this place can be an example of what young people can achieve.

My election as the member for Hinchinbrook was a humbling experience, and I am grateful to the people of the Hinchinbrook electorate for placing their faith in me to represent them in the Queensland parliament. The Hinchinbrook electorate has been represented by the Nationals for 46 years—since 1960—and between 1960 and 2006 by only three members: Sir John Row, Mr Ted Row and, most recently, Mr Marc Rowell. However, Hinchinbrook has never been a long-term safe seat for the Nationals. The people of Hinchinbrook expect effective representation and there have been several elections during those 46 years when the result was marginal, including the most recent one. The electorate has undertaken significant boundary changes over that time and will undoubtedly undergo further changes in the redistribution before the next election. As such, it is my challenge to demonstrate to the community that I am worthy of the support that it has given me. I said several times during the election campaign that I could take nothing for granted. I did not then and I will not in the future.

I will be particularly focused on ensuring that the government delivers on its promise to fix a range of pressing problems in the Hinchinbrook electorate and in north Queensland more generally. North Queensland's public health system needs urgent attention. In particular, I look forward to the long-promised new hospital in Ingham finally materialising sooner rather than later. I am concerned that the problems in the Townsville Hospital emergency department are persisting, with elective surgery cancelled and on Monday this week 26 patients left waiting for a bed in the emergency department. Things did not get much better on Tuesday.

Transport issues, such as the upgrade of the Cardwell Range crossing and the need for the relief of congestion on the Bruce Highway travelling north from Townsville between Woodlands and Bluewater, are also pressing problems. I will also be pursuing the matter of the Kirrama Range Road and the proposed Tully to Innisfail transmission line with the government. They are significant local issues that require the Beattie government to listen to the clear and unequivocal messages coming from the local community.

Although the people of Queensland have spoken and returned the government, the people of Hinchinbrook also spoke and they elected me as their voice in this place. I give them an undertaking that I will do my best to further their interests and to provide them with the strong representation that they deserve.