




Speech By  
**John Barounis**

**MEMBER FOR MARYBOROUGH**

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Record of Proceedings, 11 December 2024

**MAIDEN SPEECH**

 **Mr BAROUNIS** (Maryborough—LNP) (7.30 pm): With pride and gratitude, I rise to give my first speech as the member for Maryborough. This is a remarkable moment for me and my family. Personally, it marks the realisation of a lifelong dream, but my story of how someone like me could come to stand here is just another that highlights the incredible opportunity Australia provides—where hard work and determination can turn aspirations into reality, a great nation that values democracy and freedom and where the possibilities are limitless for those who strive to achieve them.

The fact that now I represent the people and communities of Maryborough in this place would have been the remotest of possibilities in 1970, when I was born in the small mountain village of Agrilos, Greece, more than 15,000 kilometres from here. My childhood was carefree and deeply connected to nature and shaped by my parents, who worked as olive farmers and builders. I have cherished memories of exploring the countryside with friends, uncovering the beauty of the Peloponnese region. My Christian beliefs played a significant role in my upbringing, with family attendance at our church on Sundays.

After completing the equivalent of year 12 I fulfilled my duty in the Greek military, where I had the privilege of training in the Special Forces. My military service was not just a phase of my life; it was a foundation upon which I built my character and values. It gave me the tools to approach political life with resilience, integrity and a commitment to excellence. This demanding experience also instilled in me the resilience and discipline that has guided me throughout my life. After my service, I moved to Crete to work in the building industry. It was there that I met my wife, Tricia, who has been my greatest partner in life. I met Tricia at a traditional Greek taverna and, being a romantic, that was where everything started! Shortly after, I was transferred to Athens. Tricia joined me and we stayed in Athens for several years. We married in 1997, and in 1998 we made the bold decision to start anew in Australia—a land of opportunity and the home where we would raise our children, Yannis and Zoe.

In Australia we built our lives working in the accommodation industry, leasing and later owning several motels, with our final one located in Maryborough. We became Australian citizens at a citizenship ceremony in Brisbane's City Hall on 17 March 2004. It was one of the happiest days of my life. For immigrants, settling in Australia is not always easy. For all of the positive attributes in this country, it is sometimes hard to find work and to have our experience and qualifications recognised. Settling in an area with a community of a similar cultural background is helpful, but that is not always the case in a regional centre. It is also expensive compared to many countries, so buying a house and establishing roots can be hard. The reward, though, is that, in my experience, Australians recognise the work ethic of immigrants and are willing to give people a fair go. We are welcomed into the community, and not through any sense of obligation but because they can see we have something to offer. Our customs and traditions might be a little bit different, but if we are willing to be part of the community the community is willing to embrace us.

After selling the business in 2022, I decided it was time to pursue a lifelong dream: serving my community with a party that reflects my values. My path to becoming politically active, and then seeking election, shows the opportunity that this country has to offer. The fact that the immigrant son of an olive farmer from Greece can be part of a government led by the grandson of an immigrant sugarcane farmer from Italy is all you need to know about what is possible in Queensland and Australia. Part of why I sought election is to protect and enhance exactly the things that made this possible: the idea that you are rewarded for your endeavours; that strong communities, with the right balance of government support, are the key to a strong society; and that strong communities are the function of strong families. This last value of family is particularly close to my heart and will be a major theme of mine in this chamber.

Saturday, 26 October 2024 will hold a special place in my heart as the day I was elected to this place, but it was Saturday, 27 October 2018 that shaped me and my family more—the day our son took his own life at the age of 17. My Christian faith, my family and my community got me through those darkest times. This was the start of my family's drive to improve and advocate for better mental health services for teenagers. Tricia, Zoe and I have worked closely with our federal member, Llew O'Brien, in establishing headspace in Maryborough. I also created a website called Let it Out Now, a platform where teenagers can vent their feelings without fear of repercussions. Our daughter, Zoe, is currently studying interior design at university in Brisbane where she is excelling. Zoe loves everything about uni and I have no doubt that she will succeed in whatever she chooses to do in life.

The Maryborough electorate, established in 1865, is a vibrant and diverse region that now includes over 43,000 electors. Spanning more than 4,700 square kilometres, the electorate encompasses not only the city and suburbs of Maryborough but also a range of satellite communities. These include the beautiful sandy straits coastal villages, rural townships and northern beaches, each contributing to the unique character of the area. As the elected representative for Maryborough, I am deeply committed to advocating for the entire electorate.

Throughout the election campaign, it became clear that in the past many areas outside Maryborough's central township felt overlooked and unheard. Addressing this will be a priority and I will work tirelessly to rebuild trust and ensure every community within the electorate feels represented and valued. Maryborough is a beautiful heritage city; the home of Mary Poppins, the Cistern Chapel amongst many more attributes. It has long been a tourist attraction. Maryborough's boundaries intersect with the neighbouring Hervey Bay electorate, creating shared opportunities and challenges. I extend my congratulations to the newly elected state member for Hervey Bay, David Lee, and look forward to forging a productive partnership with him. Together, we can develop strategies to tackle shared issues and unlock the potential of both electorates. Notably, around 4,500 residents commute daily between Maryborough and Hervey Bay for work, highlighting the association of our communities and economies.

I believe the Queensland government has an important role to play in the everyday lives of Queenslanders. The institutions and services led and run by the state government are of critical importance to the community, particularly the two big services of education and health. I have a strong commitment to education. It is one of the key enablers to take advantage of the opportunities I spoke of before. Maryborough has a proud tradition of excellence in education, both in the public and private sectors, and I am dedicated to upholding and building upon this legacy. Another key priority for me is health services. In my electorate the focal point for health is the Maryborough Hospital. This city deserves improved healthcare services and I will be a strong advocate for the redevelopment of this essential facility. A hospital is a cornerstone of any community and my goal is to ensure that Maryborough has a hospital that meets the needs of our residents and serves as a source of pride for everyone.

Having educated, healthy citizens is important, but having a vibrant economy for them to participate in gives them a higher quality of life. Maryborough's proud history of innovation, particularly in manufacturing, is a major part of its identity. The train manufacturing industry is a shining example of this legacy and I will give my unwavering support for preserving and expanding this vital sector and the jobs it sustains. Employment creation across all industries will remain a central focus of my work. From tourism and retail to agriculture and fishing, I am committed to supporting initiatives that drive economic growth and job opportunities. As the newly elected state member for Maryborough, I am committed to supporting all industries with equal passion and dedication.

One of my immediate priorities is addressing the pressing issue of crime and antisocial behaviour. Maryborough, with its rich history and incredible community, faces daily challenges posed by a small number of individuals. These issues have been well documented in the media and are deeply concerning to residents. It is a fundamental responsibility of the government to ensure our city's CBD is safe, welcoming and vibrant. I am fully committed to tackling this longstanding issue with dedication and urgency, working to restore safety and pride to our community.

Recently, I called a community meeting attended by over 700 concerned residents and business owners regarding the significant impact of antisocial behaviour and crime. Held at the Maryborough City Hall, it was one of the largest community-attended meetings ever seen in the region. This clearly shows the level of concern and the impact on this community, which is having a direct effect on the very fabric of our society. Numerous disturbing stories were shared about how business owners and residents have been impacted by crime and antisocial behaviour. These accounts are deeply personal, raising critical questions about why business owners can no longer keep their doors open to customers. Instead, they are forced to lock their doors due to the unacceptable behaviour and crime they face, as well as the constant fear that impacts their daily lives.

Let me share how crime, particularly youth crime, has impacted two of my constituents, Bev and Syd, a lovely couple in their 80s. In January their home was broken into and their cherished Falcon XR6 was stolen by youth offenders. Although the car was recovered, it had sustained thousands of dollars in damage. In September these young offenders broke into their home again and stole the car and other items once more. This couple now lives in fear, uncertain about what might happen next. As a new government we have a responsibility to implement laws that restore confidence in the community. When offenders are apprehended they must face consequences that prevent them from committing the same crimes repeatedly. It is time to take a stand and protect our communities. We are very proud of our city. Our community is proud and we will not let a few individuals dictate how Maryborough is seen by others.

One only needs to look at a map of my electorate to realise how important the Bruce Highway is. It is how visitors come to our region, it is how our residents move around for work and pleasure. The highway is not as safe as it could be. Maryborough, like other electorates along the Bruce, has experienced tragedy on this road and that needs to stop. I am proud to be part of a party that, at all levels of government, knows the importance of the Bruce Highway to Queensland's economy but, more importantly, to Queensland families. Collaboration with all levels of government is another key focus of mine. Local councils, as the closest level of government to the community, play a vital role in shaping our daily lives. I am committed to working closely with the Fraser Coast Regional Council and its elected representatives to address the needs of our region effectively.

I fully recognise that I could not have succeeded in standing in this chamber on my own. I want to take this moment to recognise and thank my exceptional campaign team. Without their dedication and tireless efforts, I would not be standing here before you today. The spirit and determination shown by our volunteers speak volumes about their belief not just in me but in the campaign's mission. This was about more than electing one representative; it was about bringing meaningful change to our electorate. Together we have achieved this and we have taken the first step.

I would like to highlight the contributions of some individuals who were at the core of my campaign. First and foremost my campaign manager, John McDonald. John's professionalism, incredible work ethic and unrelenting commitment were pivotal to our success. Words cannot express my appreciation for his efforts. I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Robyn and David Kemp, Rolf Light, Tony Williams, Lloyd and Anne Maddern and our regional campaign manager. Each of you played a significant role in this campaign's success and your contributions will not be forgotten. To every single volunteer who contributed, whether through big or small acts, know that you made a difference. I am so proud of what we have accomplished and am honoured to have walked this path with all of you. Thank you to our federal member, Llew O'Brien, for his trust in me; Ben Riley and his team for their support and guidance; and our former deputy leader, shadow ministers and all the other members for visiting and spending time with me in my electorate.

I thank our Premier. He believed in me and encouraged me during this journey, saying, 'You can do it, Johnny! You can do it!' He was right. Of course, I thank the people of the Maryborough electorate for placing their trust in the LNP and me. The work has just begun and I am deeply humbled to be part of the new Crisafulli LNP government.

I also look forward to partnering with my federal counterparts, Llew O'Brien and Keith Pitt. By fostering strong relationships and cooperation between local, state and federal governments, we can achieve the outcomes our community expects and deserves. I take this opportunity to thank all previous members for Maryborough of all political leanings. I have quickly learned that this is an all-consuming job and the contribution of those members over the years is not lost on me.

In closing, I must thank the most important people who supported me throughout this campaign: my wife, Tricia, and our family. Tricia encouraged me, stood by my side and helped me to navigate the inevitable moments of self-doubt. Her unwavering belief in me gave me the strength to push forward. Tricia, thank you and I love you.

I give my unwavering commitment to the people of the Maryborough electorate. I will represent you all equally, with the same passion, dedication and enthusiasm that drove my campaign. Throughout this journey it became clear that in the past many in the Maryborough community felt judged not by the content of their character but by their political beliefs. I assure you that this will stop. I am here to represent the entire community, every corner of the region and every single community member, without exception. I will always be proud of our city and community.

**Honourable members:** Hear, hear!