



Speech By
Stephen Andrew

MEMBER FOR MIRANI

Record of Proceedings, 1 May 2018

MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Mr ANDREW** (Mirani—PHON) (3.11 pm): Having been given the opportunity to address the House, it is with a great sense of accomplishment and humility that I stand here before you all today in this the 56th Parliament as the member for Mirani. It is with much pride, as a fifth-generation Australian South Sea islander, descendent of the sugarcane labourers known as the Kanakas, that I would like to acknowledge the ancient first people of Australia and their descendants of all tribes, who cared for and walked these lands for many thousands of years. We as Australian South Sea islanders have always respected their people and their traditions.

My people's roots go deep into the Mirani electorate's history as far back as the 1870s. Their blood, their sweat and their tears are literally in the soil of the Mirani electorate. In most cases, these humble people were buried where they fell in the sugarcane field. We were the disposable labour force brought in by fair or foul means from the Pacific Islands to live and work in slave-like conditions on Queensland's sugar plantations. The South Sea islanders were a people who had no monetary value. Unlike American slaves, who were bought and sold in auctions, we were cheated of wages and left to drown on reefs or shot at sea with the favoured Enfield Snider carbine, as they did not penetrate the hulls of the boats of the time. Such was the nature of our return tickets in the early 1900s when the White Australia Policy was introduced.

My people, the South Sea islanders, built the great wealth of the sugar industry that has made this state prosperous today. We survived generations of racial oppression, disadvantage and poverty largely because of our ancestors' tenacity, resilience and strong work ethic. I stand here today with an overwhelming sense of pride, ready to carry on my ancestors' legacy and bring those core hereditary attributes into my work for the Mirani electorate—an electorate that is rich in diversity, an electorate that I firmly believe has the potential to grow.

From inside our family history within the Mirani electorate, my grandfather Cedric Andrew, with whom I spent most of my young life, was the grandson of Lucy Querro. In the 1870s, as a 15-year-old girl, Great-Great-Nana Lucy was kidnapped from Oba Island in Vanuatu while she was playing on a beach. When they settled in Australia they were pushed up into the rocky hillsides, on hard marginal land, to grow their gardens and whatever cane plots they could to provide income and food.

Despite this dark history and his humble beginnings, my grandfather Cedric steadfastly maintained his morals and principles, instilling these philosophies into his children and his grandchildren until his death in 2012 at the age of 101 years. Grandfather was a man of immeasurable inspiration and integrity who wanted the betterment of and fairness for all humanity. He witnessed firsthand the people chained in misery alongside the Pioneer River being tormented by sandflies and mosquitoes. These people were flogged and beaten for even a shadow of insurrection. He worked all his life in the cane and during the off-season on the railway as a fencing ganger. He was referred to as the 'skipper'. Although he never learned to drive or had a licence, he was always on a pumper running the line.

Grandad was also known in the community as a person of trust and would be sought after when young men would act up or fall into bad company. He would give them a job alongside him on the railway or cutting cane to instil some self-worth, respect and dignity to carry with them as they moved through life. He was widely respected by many for touching their lives, even to this day. I can vouch for that personally. He raised his family in a little wooden house he built outside Mackay in the cane fields of Homebush. I can remember always cutting wood for the wood stove with a cross-cut belly saw. We always used the old hardwood sleepers that were discarded from the cane loco tracks. Every afternoon in the cool we would be working in the garden, watering our fruit trees and vegie garden and raking up the mango leaves, picking and eating the fresh fruits and digging sweet potatoes from the rich soil. Nothing was wasted. Even the coals from the wood stove were carefully spread back into the soil. Every Friday we would go into town in Uncle Charlie's FJ Holden ute. I will never forget sitting in the back with my cousins, brother and sisters singing—or some days I would just sit in the back with my dog Ranger and watch the cane fires burn on our way back to Homebush.

In the years I was growing up I never did see those old people with money, but they were never without a smile on their faces and always had kind words to say, no matter how tough the times were. I can see grandfather Cedric now, 'smiling like a goat in a cabbage patch' at me speaking about these things. This is something he frequently said with a cheeky grin.

My grandfather from my mother's side, Mr James Searl Peterson, was also born in the electorate of Mirani, at St Lawrence. He was a serviceman in the Great War 32nd Battalion and enlisted in Sarina for the Australian Imperial Force. My mother has told me stories about their battles in France, where hundreds went in and Grandad was one of 12 who came out. James ran bullock teams across the Sarina and Eton ranges and later worked on railroads with Cedric. Grandad James passed when I was young in life, so unfortunately I did not get to know him as I should. Together these two men crossed paths and worked and camped together 'down the line', as it was referred to working on the railway. This saw them travel through little towns of the Mirani electorate including the communities of Koumala, Carmila, Ilbilbie, Flaggy Rock, Clairview, Kalarka, St Lawrence, Wilmalgi, Ogmore, Cooltandra and Marlborough. It is with this legacy in mind that I will stand strong for Mirani.

Having personally known and lived with the poorest, most marginalised Australians, the South Sea islanders, I will be doing my best to be a voice in parliament to represent the silent minority with as much equality as the majority. I will boldly represent them along with the diversity of the people living in the Mirani electorate and be their strong voice in this House.

Having listened to many people within the vast boundaries of the Mirani electorate, I can say that all are concerned with the rising cost of living for families and the elderly. They grapple with high electricity and water prices, fuel and transport expenses, food prices, health care, education and child care, while many still lack modern, reliable communication. Household budgets buckle under inflated insurance costs and associated housing expenses. Struggling small businesses and the many farmers in my electorate contend every day with increasingly time-consuming and complex regulations that drain cash flow and restrict business from achieving best efficiency.

We as a rural community are clearly outnumbered and often left out of the grand designs and the decision-making in the big city. Country people are left feeling increasingly powerless when decisions are made in this way. It seems as if, 'It's no issue to us so there is no issue,' or, 'We don't use them so they don't need them.'

This is the mentality that comes into play. Common ground can be sought, which can be achieved by fewer restrictions, through more communication and negotiation with communities, landholders and businesses that present a genuine need for their actions, resources or tools. For example, we as rural citizens help contribute towards public revenue to fund public transport subsidies to the tune of \$1.43 billion for this coming financial year for the south-east corner alone. Most rural communities will never see equitable facilities but do not seek to restrict or pass judgement on what is needed or not needed elsewhere, yet people in the city dictate terms to rural people on what firearms they should or should not possess. No electorate demographic should ever be disadvantaged by another due to either geographical location, rural setting or high-density living conditions. The bush is the bush and the city is the city and should be treated as such. Both have specific requirements that do not overlap.

Concerning firearms, we as a rural community rely on firearms for more situations than I can mention here today. The first one that comes to mind is a genuine need, and this has been demonstrated over time and has many precedents regarding the use of firearms within the rural landscape. It is a nasty truth that those who seek to inflict grievous harm are not fazed by gun control laws. Flat-out restrictions do not fit all situations. The ongoing intention to further amend the firearms act to limit access to certain weapons attached to genuine need is creating a clear disadvantage for the people who put food on our plates. We should show them some respect.

Rookwood Weir and other projects like the upper Connors Dam will provide significant water resources that in their absence have stalled agricultural development in the Mirani electorate for arguably 30 years. To delay proceedings will only translate into increasing eventual construction costs and further denying opportunity in growing economic diversity, local jobs and the flow-on benefits to not only numerous rural communities in the Mirani electorate but the entire state.

The management of vegetation will require a strong bipartisan approach to establish a stable, long-term plan featuring honest negotiation and thorough onsite research and contributions from landholders across the different land types. After many years of working on the land with farmers and graziers, I have noticed that each area considers things differently. To fully stop selective clearing would actually cause more erosion than not clearing as the grass cannot survive in the thick regrowth, causing soil particulate run-off into waterways and in due course contributing to reef and marine decline.

Through my own environmental interactions through feral pest control, I know that the reduction of wild pig numbers will reduce the loss of valuable topsoils, native vegetation and rainforest, destruction of waterways and completely dug-out agricultural paddocks and, therefore, restore the natural balance of the ecosystem. When the feral animals are removed the ground heals, the grass returns and the native animals come back in numbers and restore the natural order of things. I have found it disturbingly misguided to be tagged as a pig shooter when what I do as a 'shooter person' positively impacts the betterment of the land and the reef and very likely outweighs the good intentions of people who consider themselves naturalists or environmentalists.

I was always told that you cannot catch a fish from the office or the living room. My goal is to advocate for commonsense solutions to these serious concerns and, particularly for our farmers, to reduce statutory response and review time frames. History shows us that governments can become weighted down by bureaucratic cancer, creating unnecessary repair work with little long-term logic applied. A quality parliament must stay focused on the delivery of best outcomes for the 4.6 million Queenslanders who elect its members.

Allowing oppressive decision-making ultimately white-ants the credibility of this institution. However, taking a progressive approach and entrusting ownership and authority of decision-making closer to and directly involving the stakeholders at all stages is, as I see, a vastly more productive and efficient way of achieving the best outcomes. A key tenet is to always listen, respond quickly and afford respect to all people. It is without denial also that we have made great advancements as a nation and a state and yet there is still so much work to do. It is my plan, with the simple dynamics of hard work and honesty, to do what is necessary to represent my electors who have entrusted me to do the job I was elected to do.

As the newly elected member for Mirani, I would like to thank One Nation—and I know there are some people in the gallery here today—Pauline Hanson and fellow candidates who ran alongside me: Steve Dickson, Jim Savage, Jane Truscott, Chelle Dobson and many others. I am also very honoured today to introduce and welcome four international special guests who have come a long way. They are Vanuatu dignitaries and a member of the Vanuatu parliament who are in the gallery today who have travelled to witness my first speech: Mr Atkinson Vira, member of the Vanuatu parliament; Mr Westley Nwango, Ambae chief and member of the council of chiefs and retired serviceman of the Vanuatu military forces; Mr Alicita Vuti, Ambae chief and interim chair of the Ambae council of chiefs in Port Vila; and Mr Jameson Bani, assistant to the interim chair of Ambae council of chiefs for Saralokambu and member of the chief's technical advisers for Ambae as a whole. These dignitaries of Vanuatu have made a momentous effort to attend here today, as Ambae is in a state of emergency with ongoing concerns regarding their local volcano, which is named Monaro—not the one that we think.

My heartfelt thanks go to my lovely wife, Kym, and our adorable daughters, Kyrah and Jorja. I love you dearly. My heartfelt thanks go to my dear mother, who is 79 and never missed a day of giving out pamphlets and worked so hard—I love you, Mum—and my father, who just turned 81 and who did exactly the same thing. It is just unbelievable to see the work ethic of that man. My thanks also go to my Auntie Olga, who is in her nineties and who again stood there every day giving out pamphlets, who along with my grandfather Cedric has made me a humble but strong, proud person of high moral principles who stands before you today. I thank you all from the bottom of my heart for your unwavering devotion to the campaign and I thank many other friends who helped contribute to my win. I quote—

A journey to make real impact that changes lives, give meaning to life and living, and turns vision of the masses into realities demands a true focus, an utmost zeal and robustness and an unfailing tenacity to do whatever necessary within the powers and reach of a true leader, and with all needed dexterity, wit and wisdom to make real impact have a meaning and give real liberation to the masses!

My ancestors came here from many different islands—Vanuatu, the Solomons and New Caledonia—where many different languages were spoken. One linguist counted 105 distinct Indigenous languages in Vanuatu alone. In order to have some measure of agency, the islanders had to find a way to communicate with each other and also with the plantation owners, overseers and missionaries. One of their first acts of political, cultural and social agency and resistance was the development of a common language. This became known as Kanaka pidgin English and the islanders taught and disseminated it to each other in traditional meeting places known as Nakamals, or circles of government. Many linguists believe that Bislama, now one of the official languages of Vanuatu, originates from Kanaka pidgin English. It is now with the spirit of my grandfather Cedric that I will close with the *Lord's Prayer* in pidgin to pay homage to my ancestors—

Papa bilong mifala

Yu stap antap long heven,

Mipela wanem nem bilong yu i tambu long usim nating

mipela wanem kingdom bilong yu ikam

mipela olgeta man meri long world, mipela wokim olgeta samting

long wei bilong yupela.

Mipela askim yu tedei long givem kaikai long mipela,

Mipela to askim yu long fogivem mipela long olgeta samting nogud mipela

workim bibor,

olsem mipela mus forgivem olgeta man husat i buggarupim mipela.

Mipela askim yu long no ken tekim mipela long rot, emi triam long pulim

mipela long pasin nogut

mo, mi laikim yu blokem Seten i no ken kum insait mipela.

Amen.

Everything that we have as government is from the people; everything that we do as government should be for the people.