



Speech By
Terry James

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

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MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Mr JAMES** (Mulgrave—LNP) (7.00 pm): I rise in the Queensland parliament to make my maiden speech as the new member for Mulgrave in the 58th Parliament. The Pitt family has held the seat of Mulgrave for the last 26 years and I take this opportunity to thank the Hon. Curtis Pitt and his father, Warren, before him for their service to the Mulgrave electorate. I wish Curtis Pitt and his family every success in the future. I extend my thanks to honourable members from all over the chamber, the Clerk, Mr Neil Laurie, and his staff and all those employed in the parliamentary precinct who have welcomed the new MPs with warmth and kindness.

A bit about me: I hail from the far northern part of this great state, a fourth-generation, born and raised Cairns resident. I come from a working-class pioneering Cairns family whose roots date back to the late 1800s on the Hodgkinson goldfields located north of Dimbulah just behind Mareeba. My grandfather is buried there at Mount Mulligan, the site of Australia's worst mining disaster in 1921 where 75 miners lost their lives in the mine explosion. My family eventually moved to Cairns where my father commenced his trade as a cabinet-maker and then transitioned to a lifelong career as a local Cairns builder. Two of my brothers were builders and another an architect who trained me in my profession as a building designer. Hence my entire life up until last year has been wrapped around the building industry. At the age of 21 I established my own building design business, JB Design, preparing plans for many buildings in the Mulgrave electorate and beyond. I successfully operated my business for 46 years until last year when my son-in-law took up the reins. As a result I understand how hard it is for small business and I know that small business in Far North Queensland is the largest creator of employment. Most small businesses are run by mum and dad or family and I support minimal red-tape restrictions for small business.

JB Design has been responsible in one form or another for a significant proportion of commercial, industrial, residential, multiresidential and hospitality buildings in Cairns and the surrounding areas, including Papua New Guinea, Thursday Island, Normanton and Townsville. I initially subcontracted to my brother and father before building the business into one of the largest of its kind in Far North Queensland. I employed 18 staff until Paul Keating's recession we had to have in the early 1990s, a test for any small business. Then from 2007 to 2009 we were hit with the global financial crisis—another survival test. Ironically, just after, the region around Innisfail was hit by Cyclone Larry. During this downturn I supplemented my business income by contracting to the MCS Group, a privately owned Australian national company specialising in providing independent, specialist technical reports to the insurance industry, government agencies and private individuals.

With a couple of breaks in between, I spent 22 years on Cairns Regional Council serving under three mayors. I was fortunate enough to be deputy mayor for 14 of those years, including 12 years as chairman of the local disaster management group. I chaired multiple committees, including the planning and environment committee, where I linked my professional knowledge back to the government. Others included the works committee, Cairns Water Committee, the Cairns Performing Arts Steering

Committee and the much loved Cairns Esplanade Lagoon Steering Committee. I worked both sides of the local government counter, understanding the issues challenging small businesses, the complexities of the development industry and constituents dealing with governments. I am a practical, results-driven person able to work with all parties across all levels of government to get the best results for my constituents. Over the years during my term on council, I joined many delegations from Cairns navigating the corridors of this precinct to get the best results for the city of Cairns. As deputy mayor, then mayor, I was part of the teams that advocated for the current funding commitments to allow the Cairns Water Security Stage 1 project to proceed at a reduced cost to the ratepayers of Cairns. I would sincerely like to thank the then ministers, particularly Glenn Butcher, and the shadow ministers for supporting this much needed infrastructure in the Mulgrave electorate.

Late in 2023 I became the mayor of Cairns and together we got through Tropical Cyclone Jasper, which devastated many of the communities in the electorate of my good friend and new member for Barron River Bree James. During the clean-up and recovery I saw our city's best come together. After losing the 2024 mayoral election I honestly thought that my public service career had ended and that I could finally give my wife, Carole, her long-awaited holiday. A cyclone had delayed it, then Christmas, then the local government elections. But wait, there's more. I have known our leader and new Premier, David Crisafulli, since the early 2000s when he was a councillor on Townsville City Council. I have always known he would one day be our Premier. I have been proud to see him grow and develop into the leader he is today. When he called me to ask, 'Terry, will you stand for us in Mulgrave?', I was not sure if Carole could be convinced, or the children or the grandkids, but together we agreed to jump into yet another political campaign. If you asked me when I stood for my first election back in 1991 if one day I would be the member for Mulgrave I would have told you to keep dreaming. After decades in public life, I can tell you strange things can happen and that is how I came to be here.

Ironically, many years ago the Labor candidate I recently defeated introduced me to the person who convinced me that Mulgrave was winnable. The count may have taken a long time—two weeks to be exact—and we may have gone through stages where the member for Traeger's father was on TV thinking his candidate had won the seat—sorry to disappointment the Katter family and my former council colleague—but I am here now and I will work for all constituents of Mulgrave to provide the best outcomes for all of them and I seek their support moving forward.

Over the years I have been active in our community, volunteering in many local charities: the Far North Queensland Hospital Foundation, Harald's House for homeless children and 19 years in the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard before council. I am married with five adult children and 12 grandchildren. Four of my children and 10 grandchildren live in Mulgrave. Two sons-in-law operate small businesses in Mulgrave. Two daughters work from home in Mulgrave and six grandchildren go to school in Mulgrave. As you can see, I am committed to Mulgrave. This brings me to the electorate of Mulgrave. The Mulgrave after the 2017 redistribution is nothing like the Mulgrave that most people grew up with and I suspect that when it is redistributed before the 2028 election the changes will be even more dramatic.

Mulgrave is a collection of everything that makes Far North Queensland unique. It brings together the rural, semi-rural and urban lifestyles of our region. I am also proud to be the member who represents the people of the Yarrabah Aboriginal community. During the election campaign I was proud to join now Premier David Crisafulli in Yarrabah to discuss their issues. I look forward to working with the new cabinet to deliver the best outcomes for that beautiful part of our electorate. It is a perfect place to empower the local community by establishing an ecotourism offering to capacity-build, create employment opportunities and promote a greater understanding of and appreciation for nature, the local society and culture.

Overall, the electorate is some 819 square kilometres and runs from Yarrabah to the east, the rural community of Goldsborough to the west, Gordonvale and Deeral to the south, and all the way up into the southern Cairns urban corridor covering the suburbs of Bayview Heights, Bentley Park, White Rock, Woree and Edmonton. The traditional centre of the electorate is Gordonvale, a major distinguishing feature being its local character and historical significance. Gordonvale is an example of a highly intact sugar town from the interwar period, with intact streetscapes and historical buildings as key features. The town centre strongly reflects its history as an early sugar town, with the Mulgrave Sugar Mill in the centre of the town. With urbanisation and the growth of Cairns southward, the town is undergoing significant change.

The challenge for Gordonvale's future is to ensure that this change does not destroy the town's fabric in such a way that it gets absorbed into the ever-growing Cairns urban sprawl. This is recognised by the current planning scheme, which supports the protection of this significant history by ensuring a strong sense of local identity is maintained through the retention and adaptive re-use of the existing

buildings. As your member for Mulgrave, I will ensure that remains the case. I will work with the community and the Cairns Regional Council to find the highest and best use for those buildings and work to attract new business back to town.

This brings me to the Mulgrave Settlers Museum, which must be relocated very soon. The old Gordonvale police station site would have been an ideal site for the relocation. Recently, however, the previous government sold the police station site and we now need to find another location. There is still government land behind the old police station that could be developed for a museum and visitor centre and help promote Gordonvale as the southern entry to Cairns. I will work with the community to find a site, be it that one or another, for the Mulgrave Settlers Museum.

Mulgrave is now the growth area of Cairns and in the future has the potential to be the economic powerhouse of Queensland. The Mount Peter Master Planned Area has been designed to provide homes for 40,000 people. This growth corridor is the only remaining greenfield development area of that scale within the Cairns LGA. It is forecast that the vast majority of Cairns long-term population growth will be accommodated there, but there is a severe lack of infrastructure to allow that to happen.

The current housing related infrastructure backlog significantly affects delivering affordable new housing. Additional sewerage trunk infrastructure is desperately required to allow for the next stages of Mount Peter. For a long time people have been talking about the need for this infrastructure and I say that now is the time for us to come together and get it delivered. The new LNP government announced a \$2 billion infrastructure fund for projects like that. I particularly thank our new Premier for announcing the initiative in Mount Peter during the election campaign. I strongly advocate making Mount Peter one of the first cabs off the rank for this funding. This will address the housing shortages and affordability in our region.

Adjacent to Mount Peter to the east is the Cairns South State Development Area, SDA for short, which was established in 2018 as a special economic zone to facilitate growth and the diversification of the Cairns economy. That sounds great, but after six years there is still no trunk infrastructure. There have been countless glossy documents and a lot of talk, but now is the time to get on with it. The SDA is meant to promote new industrial developments to deliver high-paying jobs for the growing communities in southern Cairns. However, securing private sector investment to create jobs simply will not happen without the base infrastructure in place. I have been involved with governments long enough to know the difference between fancy plans and brochures and delivering on the ground. The south side of Cairns will be the growth driver for Far North Queensland for a long time to come. However, that growth needs a government that gets things done.

One of the opportunities to get things done is the development of the biofuels industry. The biofuels industry is a rare opportunity to build a transformative new sector in Queensland with sustainable aviation fuels. It will be a game changer. It will allow for the diversification of the Mulgrave mill, catapult our sugarcane industry into a bold new era of growth and prosperity, inject billions into our state and local economies, and address the challenges of greenhouse gas emissions. As your member for Mulgrave, I am keen to get behind that transformative new industry. It is crucial that our government fully supports the vision as it unfolds. It will be a win-win for our local growers and the environment.

A regular, reliable and sustainable public transport system from Cairns city to the southern towns and communities is another major issue for Mulgrave. When I grew up in Cairns, the railmotor was a regular sight on the highway between Cairns and Babinda. I would like to explore this unique transport system again. If we can have 50-cent public transport fares in Brisbane, let us spare a thought for regional Queensland that does not have a regular, reliable public transport system in many towns. Discrete Aboriginal communities like Yarrabah are desperate for a regular public or private transport system to travel to Cairns. This would solve many issues, including the cost of groceries and employment in that community. Yarrabah is also suffering from the ongoing issue of insufficient housing stock.

Many honourable members may not know just how diverse Cairns is. The city was built off the backs of many different migrant communities. The Chinese community's influence in Cairns is often overlooked. I look forward to hosting our new Minister for Multiculturalism in Cairns to meet that community and so many others. I also look forward to being at the opening of the \$2.7 million Chinese culture and heritage centre. Whilst not technically in my electorate as it is in the electorate of Cairns, it is something I have been involved with for a very long time, as well as the Chinese New Year events, the Grafton Street Chinatown upgrade and the Garden of Friendship, during my time on council. Finally, we have a large Indian community in the southern suburbs and our huge Maori and Pasifika communities. Both are so different but both add to the fabric of what makes our communities amazing. Whether it is Kori and his team at Nga Matawaka or Aju, Subash and Jess and the fantastic team at GOPIO Cairns, those organisations do so much to make Cairns what it is today.

I also want to thank Senator Paul Scarr for his work with the multicultural communities in southern Cairns. A special thanks also goes to Senator Susan McDonald. You are simply amazing. From day one you were there to support my neighbouring colleagues and me and you continued that support throughout our campaigns. I look forward to working with you going forward.

Without the support of our families, none of us would be in this place. I want to thank my wonderful wife, Carole, and our five children for joining me on this new part of the continued journey in politics. You have seen all the campaigns and all the ups and downs of politics. I would not be here without you. Thank you to my children, who covered many of the polling booths again, and to the grandkids for wearing my shirt. I want to thank Andrew Cripps for his dedication, determination and patience when coordinating our candidates in the Far North.

To my campaign team of Ross, Gerry, Martin, Rob and Darcy, in particular, who somehow worked for David, Bree and me at the same time: thanks for keeping the faith. Very few thought this seat could be won, particularly with a short, six-week campaign, but you always believed in me through some difficult times. I will not let you down. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker and honourable members, for the opportunity to present my maiden speech to the 58th Queensland Parliament.