



Speech by

MIKE REYNOLDS

MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

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ADDRESS IN REPLY

Mr REYNOLDS (Townsville—ALP) (5.36 p.m.): It is with a great deal of pleasure that I am able to make my maiden speech as the member for the State seat of Townsville in this 49th Parliament. I would first give my very sincere congratulations to the Speaker and Deputy Speaker on their elevation to their positions. I wish them the very best in their future deliberations.

The seat of Townsville is a diverse, exciting and challenging seat. I will represent the constituents of this seat on behalf of the Australian Labor Party with a great deal of pride. I am very much looking forward to my role as the State member for that area as, over the last 25 years, I have had a long and successful association with the City of Townsville and the region that it serves. I have very special memories of the time that I spent as an elected member in the Townsville City Council from 1973 to 1989.

The Labor Party has had a proud tradition of representation in the city at a local, State and Federal Government level. Indeed it seems a long time since I was elected in 1973 as the sole Labor Party councillor on the Townsville City Council and the first Labor councillor for 24 years. Of course, I then went on to become deputy mayor in 1976 in the first Labor council in the history of the City of Townsville. That first Labor council was led by former Opposition Leader, Mayor Perc Tucker, who was a popular and successful Labor Mayor until his untimely death in August 1980. Later that year, I was elected as Mayor of the City of Townsville, was re-elected on three occasions and retired from that position in March 1989. It is with pride that I can state that the Labor City Council in Townsville is in its record 23rd year and strongly and capably led by my mayoral successor Councillor Tony Mooney.

I would particularly like to thank the very large number of party and family members who have contributed to my successful election as the member for Townsville. Pam, my wife and partner for 25 years, my daughter Nikki and my son Todd deserve a very special thanks for their assistance and tolerance over the 18-month election campaign. As members would appreciate, there is always a very fine line between the many political and party obligations that one has and the need for quality time with one's family. I know that I have been very fortunate to have three family members who have not only been greatly supportive but who also have a very strong and active interest in politics. I would also like to place on record my thanks to my 90-year-old mother, Dorothy Reynolds, who has had an active interest in politics throughout her lifetime. She has been a great supporter of all my political endeavours and inculcated in me many of the values and principles that I bring to my political life.

My election to Parliament has been very much a team effort and I would like to thank the hundreds of Labor Party members and supporters who have assisted me in my campaign. My heartfelt thanks go to my campaign executive consisting of Tom Greenwood, my campaign director; Peter Le Grand, my campaign secretary; and the campaign treasurer, Kevin Bycroft. I want to especially mention two members of the Labor Party who have had a tremendous influence over my political career and who have given me wonderful support since I joined the Labor Party in 1970. I refer to two life members of the Australian Labor Party, Arthur Trower of the Currajong branch and Norm Wilson of the Hermit Park branch. Both of these Labor stalwarts were members of my campaign committee and have worked tirelessly for the Labor movement for the last four decades. I would also specially thank Eddie Thornton, Angela Hill, Barry Ramsay, Denise Thompson, Warren Shepherd, Jacki Kerr, Jessie Maher and Neil Sellers who gave unstintingly of their time as members of the campaign committee.

As I have already mentioned, the Townsville electorate is diverse, including much of the older and historical suburbs of Townsville in the southern area of the city, the northern suburbs that wind their way around Castle Hill and a number of suburbs in the western area of the city. It also includes the central business district, Townsville's administrative and governmental heart, Townsville's port, the Strand and kilometres of coastline. The diversity of the electorate is further enriched by the inclusion of Magnetic Island and Palm Island. This very rich blend of community brings with it particular concerns and issues, and I will be expanding on some of them today.

The Beattie Labor Government has hit the ground running and Queenslanders have been extremely impressed with the performance and the speed of the decision making of Premier Peter Beattie and his Ministry. The key theme of the Beattie Government of job creation and job stability is extremely relevant to the Townsville electorate and the commitments that the Government has made for the city and the region.

In stark contrast to the capital works freeze imposed by the former Treasurer after the election of the coalition in February 1996, the Beattie Labor Government is getting on with the job. The \$25m Strand project will proceed because of the \$15m commitment that the Government has made to Townsville and this project. Over the past two years, the Strand coastline has been devastated by cyclonic and heavy rainfall influences and is in urgent need of repair. This partnership project between the State Government and the Townsville City Council will see the restoration of the beach and the esplanade and key coastal development work undertaken towards the long-term protection of the seafront. The project also provides for a world-class landscaped sea vista, which will be used extensively by residents and tourists. Importantly, it will be a major job creator for Townsville.

During the 18 months of my candidature, I campaigned strongly against the excesses of National Competition Policy, the so-called level playing field and the social impact that such policies had on people. As the then President of the National Tertiary Education Union at James Cook University, I condemned the Howard Government's attacks on tertiary education, the former State Government's attacks on technical and further education and in particular the erosion of our TAFE system. I once again applaud the initiative of the Premier in introducing a public benefit test in the application of the competition policy. At the end of the day, we need to ask ourselves particularly why Governments introduce competition policy into public sector planning decisions if there is no tangible public benefit and a range of quite obvious disadvantages. The bottom line must surely be the social impact on people and, in particular, job creation as well as quality service delivery rather than job losses and rather questionable service delivery outcomes. I am unashamedly a supporter of a strong public sector and will vigorously advocate on behalf of the nearly 40% of the Townsville/Thuringowa work force who are employed in the public sector.

Over the past decade, we have seen an erosion of rail operations in Townsville. I have worked closely with the rail unions and employees and I am determined that Townsville's contribution to rail operations in Queensland will be given the status it deserves. Both the Premier and the Deputy Premier have been closely involved in the compilation of a policy that recognises the key role that Townsville will play as part of the Queensland Rail network. Our \$20m commitment to relocate heavy engineering workshops to Stuart will see the development of a heavy duty engineering centre of excellence. This will give Townsville the capacity to compete for statewide Queensland Rail maintenance and capital works projects that will enhance job security for rail employees in Townsville.

For a number of years now, inner-city Townsville has been suffering from stagnation and decline in a way similar to that experienced by other Queensland cities such as Cairns and Rockhampton, other cities throughout Australia and, indeed, throughout the world. Over the past decade, we have witnessed the extension of suburban shopping centres and further strip development with extra commercial zonings being granted. All of those factors have had an enormous impact on the viability of the inner city. Of course, the Townsville City Council is the major planning agency but the State Government also has a role to play in partnership with the council, the business community and the community at large. A number of productive discussions have been held with the mayor and members of the business community to advance a planning and redevelopment model that will address the inner-city decline. The Government has tenure over a range of inner-city sites, including the vacant North Yard railway workshops and Townsville Port Authority land adjacent to Ross Creek.

Presently, we are discussing with the Townsville City Council the concept of a land bank, which would include public sector properties with an ability to promote and market investment and development opportunities that could help to bring life back to the CBD. I am very much aware that inner-city redevelopment needs to be carried out sensitively to ensure that we enhance inner-city retail operations rather than take away from them.

There are examples in other cities where Government intervention has occurred that I believe have been to the detriment of other city retailers. Much of inner-city Townsville has a proud historical heritage that has been protected through the introduction of development control plans initiated by the Townsville City Council in the 1980s. I am determined to see the ongoing protection of these historical

precincts and to protect the amenity and community interest of residents who live in residential areas adjoining the CBD.

As I have mentioned already, Palm Island is situated within the Townsville electorate. I take this opportunity to commend the work of the Palm Island Aboriginal Community Council, which is ably led by Councillor Peena Geia. My first association with the island goes back to 1974. There are many pressing economic and social issues that are facing Palm Island. I am delighted with the work that I was able to do as a candidate and the partnerships that have been forged between me and key stakeholder groups on the island. There is strong agreement that the time for research and the time for more reports is over and that it is time for action. The people of Palm Island, the Aboriginal Community Council, the ATSIC councillors and Government bodies know the issues, they know the problems and concerns, and they are keen to see a coordinated approach to enhance Palm Island's economic and social development. I believe that the key to a successful coordinated approach is self-determination and empowerment. As a State member, I see my role as one of working closely with the community and Government departments to further facilitate this process.

I have been tremendously encouraged by the work that is being undertaken currently on Palm Island by the Townsville district of the Queensland Health Department. This community development approach is aimed at enhancing both the social and economic life of Palm Islanders. It encapsulates the need for a holistic approach that recognises that an individual's wellbeing is impacted on by both social and economic factors. In a like way, I have been tremendously encouraged by the quality of community leadership on Palm Island. I look forward to working with the people of Palm Island on the enhancement of social and economic outcomes that will improve the health and lifestyle of its people. Some of the key issues to be examined include the need for more community housing, the greater involvement of Palm Islanders in economic development, job creation and the introduction of a protocol between local, State and Federal Governments.

The Townsville electorate and, indeed, the region as a whole has one of the highest proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in an urban area in Australia. Over the past three decades, James Cook University and the former Townsville College of Advanced Education recognised the priority that should rightfully be given to the educational needs of indigenous Australians. We have seen hundreds of indigenous graduates who are playing a purposeful professional and leadership role in Government, business and community endeavours. These educational outcomes have been strongly supported by both Labor and coalition Governments at a State and Federal level. The proposed medical school at James Cook University will have a particular emphasis on indigenous health.

From my own professional and political background, I am aware that any examination of the nation's social indicators would show that indigenous Australians are tremendously disadvantaged as members of the Australian community. Indigenous Australians have the highest level of unemployment, the lowest level of education, the worst mortality and morbidity rates, the highest proportion of imprisonment and the highest level of housing need. Indeed, it does not matter which social indicator one examines, historically indigenous Australians have not been treated equally and today they are the most disadvantaged group in Australia. These facts negate the simplistic and untruthful approach to indigenous issues that is presently being perpetrated by the One Nation Party. If all Australians are to be treated equally, we need to recognise the disadvantages that are inherent in the indigenous community and work towards solutions where all Australians, irrespective of the colour of their skin, can expect equal social and economic outcomes.

I am strongly committed to the process of reconciliation and as a member of the Queensland Aboriginal Reconciliation Committee I appeal to all Queenslanders to work towards unity and reconciliation. The State Government has a purposeful role to play in the reconciliation process. I applaud the leadership of the Premier, which is inclusive in nature and cognisant of the history and needs of indigenous Australians. The inclusion of Neville Bonner, a distinguished indigenous Australian, in the formal opening of Parliament by the Governor is indicative of that leadership.

I want to recognise today the urgent need for the Garbutt urban renewal program to get back on track. The project was an excellent initiative of the Goss Labor Government and stalled badly when the coalition came to power in February 1996.

The former Treasurer's capital works freeze had a devastating impact on the suburb of Garbutt. The stalling of this program saw about 80 families moved from the suburb, enrolments at the primary school, preschool and local day care centre drastically reduced, and a 20% to 30% reduction in the turnover and profits of local businesses. We also suffered the loss of the local doctor and the closing down of the local service station. The former coalition Government should well hang its head in shame when it comes to Garbutt. The present Labor Government has committed itself to finishing the Garbutt urban renewal program over the next three years.

I have had a long association with Magnetic Island during my time in local government and I look forward to working with the Magnetic Island community as their State member. This beautiful suburb of Townsville and tourism destination is 20 minutes from the inner city and is linked with a modern and efficient ferry service. There are many challenges facing the island, and I have worked during my campaign with key stakeholders on the resolution of a number of these issues.

The failed development at Nelly Bay is an ugly blot on the Magnetic Island landscape, and the development of a safe harbour and associated public and private infrastructure remains a very high priority. A supplementary environmental impact statement will soon be open to community consultation and the Government has committed \$6m to the development of public infrastructure so that the development of the safe harbour and associated infrastructure can proceed. The development will be subject to strict environmental scrutiny through the EIS process.

Another major issue on Magnetic Island has been the equitable access to public health facilities and, in particular, the role of the nursing sister at the Magnetic Island Clinic. In the last 18 months, Magnetic Island residents and visitors have been disadvantaged with the role of the nursing sister being greatly diminished. We saw a 40-year practice of the nursing sister being able to supply limited treatment and drugs to patients seriously curtailed. We saw a ridiculous situation in which the nursing sister was not legally able to administer oxygen to an asthmatic, give an angina tablet to an elderly heart patient or urgently administer an antihistamine to a patient with wasp stings without consulting with a doctor. This absurd situation will change with the introduction of a protocol which will define the role of the nursing sister more clearly. In particular, the protocol will define sensible powers which the nursing sister should have in an isolated community such as Magnetic Island.

I take this opportunity to commend the Magnetic Island Community and Commerce Association for the excellent work that it is undertaking on behalf of the Magnetic Island community, and I look forward to a productive relationship with it. I have discussed with the Association the Government's strong support for ecotourism and the marketability of Magnetic Island as a tourism destination. I see the need for an integrated tourism and community management plan for the island with local, State and Federal Governments and the community working towards such a plan.

There is a recognition that more resources are required in establishing tourism, recreation and community infrastructure for both island residents and tourists. I will be advocating that Magnetic Island be recognised by the Federal Government as a unique tourism destination in the World Heritage Area and that it be eligible for special assistance in this regard.

I am strongly committed to seeing the Chevron gas project become a reality and to the development of a base load power station in the Townsville/Thuringowa region. Over the last five years, the Townsville community has been united in its quest for industrial development and growth which should occur in a planned, ecologically and socially sustainable manner.

The nexus that exists between Townsville and the Carpentaria-Mount Isa minerals province has seen huge economic spin-off benefits to the city and region. During my six years as Chairman of the Townsville Port Authority, from 1990 to 1996, we saw a doubling of trade throughput and \$300m worth of development committed to the port. Western Mining Corporation is presently finalising its plans for exporting one million tonnes of fertiliser through the Port of Townsville.

I believe that the Townsville/Thuringowa region is destined for a sustained period of industrial development and growth, with key economic and social benefits accruing to our city and our region. The challenge will be to ensure that this development occurs within a socially and ecologically sustainable framework. The Labor Government's strong commitment to Townsville has been well promoted, and I am confident that the city can play an extremely purposeful role in job creation and job stability through planned industrial development.

I look forward to the role that I will be playing in this 49th Parliament as the member for Townsville. I will advocate strongly on behalf of my constituents and for the sustained economic and social development of the Townsville community.
