



Speech by

Dr LESLEY CLARK

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

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RITA MILLS

Dr LESLEY CLARK (Barron River—ALP) (10.27 a.m.): Last Saturday I was privileged to be a guest speaker at the launch of Rita Mills' latest CD album *Mata Nice*, which translates as 'irresistibly nice'. For many in south-east Queensland this may be an unremarkable event, but in her home country, the Torres Strait Islands, Rita Mills is nothing less than a living legend adored by all. A naturally gifted musician and singer, she made a ukulele at the age of seven with odds and ends from around the house. When she turned nine, she taught herself to play on her brother's guitar, and so began a career that has spanned more than five decades.

A born entertainer, she first sang and played at functions and hotels on Thursday Island. And then with her two sisters, Cessa and Ina, the famous Mills sisters were born. From 1988 to 1995 they travelled to over 80 major musical festivals and concerts throughout Australia and Europe, including Expo '88, where they were a great hit. In 1995 the Prime Minister awarded them Australia's highest indigenous art award, the Red Ochre Award.

It was in that year that Rita decided to embark on her own career, promoting her people and sharing her unique Torres Strait Island culture all over the world, acting as an extraordinary ambassador for the Torres Strait Islands and for Australia. People who see her performances enjoy not only unique music and dance but also feel in their hearts her message of friendship. Just as she was inspired by Eartha Kitt, her music and achievements are an inspiration to young indigenous women, sending the message: be proud of your culture, stand tall and strong and achieve your dreams.

Saturday's launch at the Small Pier Marketplace Theatre was full to overflowing with family friends and supporters to pay their respects and enjoy a fun-loving performance by this national treasure, who is herself most definitely and above all 'Mata Nice'. Thank you, Rita, for the privilege, and congratulations on a wonderful new CD.
