




Speech by

Annastacia Palaszczuk

MEMBER FOR INALA

Hansard Thursday, 1 November 2012

MOTION OF CONDOLENCE: DEERAL, MR E

 **Ms PALASZCZUK** (Inala—ALP) (Leader of the Opposition) (9.45 am): I rise to pay tribute to Eric Deeral, a former member for Cook. Mr Deeral was a member of the Gamay Warra clan of Guugu Yimithirr people and was born at the Hope Vale mission. Eric left school at 13 to work as a stockman and became chairman of the Hope Vale Community Council at the age of 25. Mr Deeral holds a singular honour as the first, and so far only, Aboriginal man or woman to serve as a member of the Queensland parliament. While Mr Deeral will always be the first Indigenous person in this parliament, he does not need to be the only one. I am sure he would celebrate the election of more Indigenous men and women to this place. I think both sides of the House should make a concerted effort to have more Indigenous representation in this House over the years to come.

Mr Deeral's election in 1974 was interesting to say the least. Eric was one of the two officially endorsed National Party candidates for the seat of Cook. Eric emerged with the most votes and wrested the seat from Labor. As the first Indigenous member of this place, Eric had a special role in representing the Indigenous people of Queensland. He could speak with authority on the disadvantage faced by Indigenous people. I want to quote from Mr Deeral's maiden speech, which the Premier mentioned earlier. He said—

The Deerals have lived in Cook over 20,000, so if length of residence is any indication of really interested representation, I must surely have a huge advantage.

In his election to this place and in his example, Eric has inspired another generation of Aboriginal leaders, including Noel Pearson. I understand that Eric was a central figure in Mr Pearson's honours thesis on the Hope Vale mission. While Eric obviously had a special interest in and a special perspective on Indigenous issues, he represented every member of his electorate equally. He championed infrastructure improvements for the Cook electorate, including sealed, all-weather roads from Karumba through Normanton, Croydon and Georgetown to Cairns. He also pushed for improved telecommunications infrastructure on the cape and tourism developments.

After leaving this place in 1977, Eric continued to advocate for a number of advances and issues close to his heart. He was a delegate to the Queensland Aboriginal Coordination Council and served as chairman of the legislation review committee that reviewed Queensland legislation impacting on Aboriginal land rights during the early 1990s. He also helped to develop the elder visitor programs to several Queensland correctional centres, which the Premier also raised in his speech.

Earlier this year, the Speaker made the wise decision to rename the Indigenous youth parliament in Mr Deeral's honour. I am glad Mr Deeral will continue to live on and receive the recognition he deserves through the youth parliament. I am also pleased that the youth parliament was renamed while Eric was alive to see it.

I place on record the recognition of and the gratitude for Mr Deeral's efforts both in this parliament and in the wider community. I acknowledge that some members of his family and his clan are here today. He will be sadly missed.