



Speech by


# David Kempton

MEMBER FOR COOK

Hansard Thursday, 31 May 2012

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## MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Mr KEMPTON** (Cook—LNP) (5.40 pm): I acknowledge the Premier, Campbell Newman, who has provided us all with a vision for change and a strong hand on the tiller; the Deputy Premier, Jeff Seeney, who counselled temperance when things got heated during the campaign; all of the shadow ministers and now ministers who supported me over the past 12 months; and my colleagues of this the 54th Parliament of Queensland. I congratulate the Speaker of the House on her historic and timely appointment. I want to acknowledge my friend Eric Deeral, a Gamay elder of the Guugu Yimithirr nation, who held the seat of Cook for our party from 1974 to 1977 as the first Aboriginal parliamentarian in Queensland. I also acknowledge Edmond Willie Woibo, a Binthi man, a true visionary who left us before his work was done. He was my friend and mentor. I also want to acknowledge Detective Senior Constable Damian Leeding in whose memory I wear this tie today. I thank the parliamentary staff for their guidance and infinite patience over past weeks in coping with all 50 new members who, in the first week, walked around these halls trying to look important, acting as if we knew where we were going. An attendant remarked that we looked like a mob of ducklings—where one would go, the rest would scurry. That might explain how 25 of us ended up in the toilet!

Entry to political life has always been with the best of intention and, in most cases, a very noble undertaking. But why do we rise to the call to politics? The usual response is that we are here to make a difference. When I was posed with the 'why' question, it turned out for me there was no simple answer. There are, however, three possibilities—firstly, the phases of life. Self-interest dominates the initial phase of our life as children, teenagers and young adults. How do we get our needs met? How do we interact at school? How do we get on socially? For kids it is all about cars, bars and iPhones. Family occupies much of the second phase, typically involving marriage, a home, securing a future, raising kids with good values, stacking away super and trying to keep our hair on and our weight off! The third phase involves providing us with an opportunity to use our wisdom, our lifestyles and our experience to serve our community in a full-time capacity. So we transition from self to family to community. Serving my community is where I find myself after 35 years in the law. I can only admire those among us who manage to balance self, life and community at the one time. Having spent most of my working life away from my family, I urge each of you with young children to spend some quality time in your children's space as often as possible. Talk to them about whatever is going on in their lives because it is as important to them as the four pillars are to us.

The second-most compelling influence arose through a professional lifetime of battling government and bureaucrats as I witnessed the erosion of property rights and personal interests throughout this great state. By way of example, what successive Labor governments have done to the once great pastoral industry of Queensland at the behest of the ideological green movement would cause our forefathers to turn in their graves. I acted for a young family who about 20 years ago purchased a run-down grazing lease near Emerald, using their life savings and some borrowings. This family with their three kids lived under a blue tarp strung over a pole whilst they built a home and developed a lease into an exemplary grazing property. In true Queensland tradition, these battlers built a castle from a pile of rocks with blood, sweat and tears. In their hands this property became a highly productive, weed and feral animal-free enterprise and represented their life's work. It was that family's future. Their dream never faded, even with the loss of one of those children in tragic circumstances.

The grazing lease was over a state forest which had long since ceased being a timber resource. In the late nineties the Labor government signed a deal with the Greens to convert all timber reserves in state forests in Queensland into national parks. This meant that as grazing leases over forest reserves came to an end they would not be renewed and would be converted into national parks. This young Queensland family who knew no other lifestyle or vocation were going to be thrown off their family farm by a Labor government without compensation. They would be left holding a mortgage to the bank and a very uncertain future. They approached me for help and together we took the Labor government to the Supreme Court. The state started a war of attrition against this young family, thinking that we would run out of money before the matter got to trial. This was never going to happen, because neither the family nor I had any money and me as a sole practitioner did not have any to start with! What we did have was a determination not to be bullied by an uncaring Labor government, and when the government realised it was not going to win it folded and renewed the lease. I have not heard from that family since that matter settled—until last night when I got home and checked my emails. By some divine process, here was the message I received, and I have to say that these people had no idea that I was delivering my maiden speech here today—

Hi David, we both wanted to congratulate you on your new position. We will never forget how you got our lease back for us here at 'Crystal Creek' Capella, but is our battle won yet, as the years are still ticking closer to our 10 year lease running out. It is you that saved us from losing our home. I am grateful to you each day. We hope the change in Government looks hopeful things will improve for all of us that have leasehold land.

Regards, Wendy and Richard Barlow

This will be a matter that I will be taking up with Mr Cripps quite soon. This is by no means an isolated example.

The third reason for my entry into politics is opportunity. The electorate of Cook and the Premier, in his infinite wisdom, have given me an opportunity to bring a life's work and experience to the electorate, this parliament and the ministry. I am humbled by my election and the appointment. It is my view that to succeed as politicians and as a party we must continually check in with our values and motivations. I value family, integrity, friendship and, above all, a fair go for all.

I want to reflect briefly on leadership. Leadership usually attracts such descriptors as strong, accountable, visionary and humility. There are, however, two important leadership qualities that became evident in the 2012 campaign. A good leader must define him or herself at the outset. What does he stand for? What are his core values? What is his history? How does he communicate with his peers and with his people? Our leader, Campbell Newman, etched his style early as a no-nonsense, fair and inclusive leader who likes to get things done and has remained true to this position throughout his political life. It has a whole lot more to do with integrity and trust than being popular. The second leadership attribute became obvious during the unparalleled and totally unjustified assault by the Labor Party on the Newman family during the election campaign. Campbell Newman did what a vast majority of the community would have done in his position: he got on with the job of getting elected and did not engage in the disgusting tactics of Labor. People want a leader who is like them and who does what they would do in a time of crisis.

I was born in central New South Wales a long time ago and grew up on a small cattle property and learned about hard work very early. I never accepted the word 'can't' as a reason for not doing something, and I still do not. My parents were not wealthy. However, they saw all six children achieve a university education and go on to lead productive lives and raise families of their own—although not with the same enthusiasm for offspring as exhibited by my parents!

I entered law in 1976 and was admitted as a solicitor and barrister in 1982 in the Supreme Court of the ACT and the Federal Court and the High Court. I was later admitted into practice in New South Wales and ultimately in Queensland in 1988. I was not known as a conformist and was never afraid to take the extra step to see justice afforded to my clients. I came to Cape York as a tourist in 1985 on a pilgrimage around Australia. My motor car, a current model Toyota, broke down in Cooktown and by the time the parts arrived I was a local—and they still have not arrived. In 1988, I set up the first law practice in Cooktown since 1935, which proved to be an exciting and richly rewarding experience, although not in any monetary sense. I purchased a small farm on the Endeavour River where I raised my family. I part-owned and managed a cattle station in Cape York in the late 1990s, which gave me a great insight into how tough life can be in Cape York. It was here I was able to live out my passion to play cowboys. Michael Trout has not eaten dust until he chews on the bulldust of Cape York.

I became involved in the Wik native title claim on behalf of the farmers in about 1996 as the pendulum swung to and fro in the courts—a decision favouring the applicants, an appeal that swung to the pastoralists, followed by another appeal and another round of endless litigation. It seemed to me that the pastoralists and the Aboriginal elders were saying the same thing. They had existed together in Cape York for a long time and wanted to sort out a solution among themselves. We got the parties together and nipped out an agreement between the pastoral leaseholders and the native title claimants that endures today. I was excited by this notion of negotiated outcomes and I am proud to say that the Wik claim did not thereafter return to court until the final determination in 2004.

I moved to Cairns in 2003 to put my girls through school, and I am very keen now to get back to the bush. I had never been a member of a political party until just prior to my preselection in June last year. There can be no doubt, however, as to my political leanings. I have made my presence felt to every Labor government in Queensland in the last 20 years.

I have heard many members who have spoken before me waxing lyrical about their wonderful electorates with diverse cultures and amazing landscapes and the exciting challenges they face. I can assure members that my electorate surpasses all of these well-intentioned but feeble efforts at electoral supremacy, no matter how eloquent, glossy or descriptive they might be. The number of visits by the Premier, the ministers, federal colleagues and other dignitaries stands as testimony to my claim. Who else can boast—yes, boast—dense rainforests, spectacular reefs, tumbling waterfalls, savanna woodlands, amazingly untamed rivers—and I dare not use the word ‘wild’—the best barramundi and reef fishing in the world, cattle stations, Aboriginal communities, mining towns, agriculture and farming communities, and the jewel in the crown, of course, the spectacular Torres Strait, and I am not even going to talk about the weather. I rest my case.

The electorate of Cook presents an enormous challenge. We have talked about the mess Queensland is in and the problems that face my electorate are many and serious and I do not intend to list them here. I will, however, mention a few needs. For the Tablelands, it is all about infrastructure and services, cheaper power and water, transport, a hospital, law and order, a much needed wind farm and, of course, undoing the devastating impact of Labor’s heartless act of amalgamation. In Douglas, we again have amalgamation, a sugar industry crippled by red tape, flagging tourism, no aged care and a stalled waterfront development. Cooktown needs all of the above. All of the industries of the Cook electorate—grazing, mining, fishing, tourism and agriculture—suffer from years of neglect, red tape, lack of infrastructure support and research and development. Weipa has a chronic shortage of housing and lack of essential services and faces the issue of normalisation.

The federal government’s interference with the South of Emberley expansion at the request of the Wilderness Society is an abuse of power. It is a serious threat to the economic future of several Indigenous communities, the town of Weipa and this state. I will expend all my effort in making the Cook electorate an example of what works well by adhering closely to the policies of this government and its plan for the future. This will be done in consultation with communities and hard work.

I have lived and worked and travelled throughout Cape York for over a quarter of a century. Can I say that successive state and federal Labor governments have spent millions, if not billions, of dollars keeping our first Australians living in a Third World condition. This is a blight upon our country and cannot upon any interpretation find harmony with the vision, values and goals for this great state as portrayed first in the Premier’s address to this House and echoed in every maiden speech since. The Premier and his leadership team have embarked upon a process of change that will define this government in the history of Indigenous relations as courageous, innovative and responsive.

My appointment to the position of Assistant Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs is as onerous as it is humbling. In Glen Elmes we have a minister who is unafraid to make the hard calls, yet displays great insight and understanding. Together we will represent a formidable force against those who think it will be business as usual in the Cook electorate. I have talked widely with the elected representatives, elders and communities of the electorate of Cook and, if I am able to exert any influence, this government will for the first time in the history of this state return dignity and respect and provide real self-determination to the Indigenous communities that populate vast areas of Queensland.

I believe that we should concentrate on the potential of communities to provide their own solution and not to continue to portray them as the problem. I believe in the potential of every human being to contribute to their own wellbeing and the community in which they exist. Indigenous communities do not need more empowerment, capability building, traineeships, partnerships or any of the other plethora of ideas that we have developed for them; they simply need to be given a choice. By providing all Indigenous communities with a choice to decide their own future, manage their own issues and participate in a real economy, there is an opportunity to bring about positive and sustainable change. This will be by way of community owned and driven long-term plans that will become a blueprint against which all programs, projects and funding will be aligned. With this comes a community responsibility for leadership, probity and engagement.

We need to shift our emphasis from spending large amounts of money on infrastructure and services that are often not fit for purpose. We need to support community growth and economic development. We need to provide every Indigenous person in Queensland with an opportunity to own their own home—a freehold home just like ours. Tenure underpins community growth and economic development. The biggest threat to lasting change in Indigenous communities is the welfare mentality of bureaucracy and outside agencies, all well-meaning but often misguided.

I now turn to the environment. In forming an alliance with the Greens for the sake of a few preference votes, Labor’s failed environmental management policy in Cape York has foreclosed on

economic development and community growth in my electorate. Labor has failed to comprehend that an environment comprises natural systems and the people who live in and interact within those systems. A recent independent assessment of environmental management in Cape York in respect of which the previous government participated revealed that the past practices have wholly failed to deliver. On a score of 100, where 40 represents a total system failure, Labor's environmental management policy rated 64. Like Labor, this policy is bankrupt.

The national park expansion strategy, wild rivers and the proposed blanket World Heritage listing of Cape York are all failures and have been overwhelmingly rejected by the community. We need as a government to act quickly to unwind the devastating impact of these failed experiments. The Wild Rivers Act is an absolute disgrace. What a contemptuous, altruistic and insulting attempt at environmental protection! Whenever did effective management come about by prohibition? All management strategies and policies must be inclusive of the community if they are to succeed. The three biggest threats to the environment we know as Cape York are weeds, feral animals and the Greens. We need to eradicate all three from Cape York.

I would like to thank my campaign manager, Max Dickensen, and all of my campaign team who drove me across the line to end over 40 years of mediocrity in the Cook electorate in a hard-fought and well-won election. I would like to acknowledge that my two daughters, Melanie and Sophie, are the light of my life and my inspiration. I thank my parents, my family and all my friends for their support. I acknowledge the tireless efforts of the Premier and all the shadow ministers who travelled frequently north to assist to get us all over the line.

I acknowledge Joe Hockey who launched my campaign, Warren Entsch who has given me unlimited access to his time and knowledge and I thank Barnaby Joyce. I give heartfelt thanks to all those friends, old and new, some who are in the gallery, who have supported me in so many ways, people too many to name but who I have thanked personally and to whom I am forever grateful. I thank Gavin King and Michael Trout for their unswerving support. We will stand together to make sure distance does not dim our presence here in the south-east.

I acknowledge Robyn Quick who not only would have made an excellent member but would have gone part way to correct the gender imbalance in our party, something we should strive for in the future. Finally I thank the people of Cook who have given me an opportunity to serve my community and in doing so fulfil a dream. I give my pledge before this House that I am determined to respect my people and my party and to ensure that the trust in me is honoured.

I would like to conclude with a referee story and perhaps a lesson for us all. In his maiden speech my colleague Tim Mander recounted his ambition to be a footballer. However, his calling extended only to being a referee. I recently received by email a request from a local football club which I scanned quickly and read it to say 'we need your support for a funding application and to be a referee'. So I got on to my personal assistant and I said to please respond that I was happy to support the proposal however I had not been involved in football for 35 years and would not know the rules to be able to be an adequate referee. They wrote back and said, 'We don't want him to referee the football, we just want him to referee the funding application'. This is a lesson to us all: read your emails. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, thank you, parliament.