



Speech by


## Hon. Glen Elmes

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

Hansard Thursday, 1 November 2012

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### MOTION OF CONDOLENCE: DEERAL, MR E

 **Hon. GW ELMES** (Noosa—LNP) (Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs and Minister Assisting the Premier) (9.48 am): I rise to speak to the condolence motion to mark the passing of Queensland's first Indigenous parliamentarian. I would like to acknowledge the members of the Deeral family and the traditional custodians who have travelled to be with us today.

Mr Deeral demonstrated leadership and advocacy at a practical level which focused on results and lifestyle improvements for the people he represented. He acknowledged that his Aboriginality meant that he would be seen as a spokesman for Indigenous people. He was happy to accept that role but he was equally adamant that he represented the whole of the Cook electorate and would fight to see that every one of his constituents got a fair deal. He was forthright in seeking improvements to infrastructure and for improvements to education and health services. In that sense he was something of the classic member of parliament.

In other ways he was ahead of his time in promoting issues which still have currency today. For example, in his maiden speech Mr Deeral highlighted the damage done to Indigenous people by the welfare mentality. On 18 March 1975 he told this place—

The people responsible for handing out cash for no effort are condemning them to oblivion.

He went on to say—

No man can continually accept hand-outs without losing his initiative and self-respect.

These are issues that are still active today, and the sentiments expressed in that maiden speech are echoed by Noel Pearson and other Indigenous leaders still today. It is disappointing that almost 40 years later little progress appears to have been made in improving the economic sustainability for Indigenous communities. I think Mr Deeral would rightly be disappointed that his successors at all levels of government have been unable to bring his vision to reality. He saw that the future for Indigenous people lay in self-sufficiency rather than dependency, and he devoted his life to making that happen. Mr Deeral served just one term as the member for Cook, but his connection and active commitment to the electorate continued for many years after, while ever he was physically able to do so.

The former member for Cook was proud of both his heritage and his connection to the country he represented. Unfortunately, I never had the pleasure of meeting Mr Deeral, but there was no shortage of people prepared to tell me what a passionate and committed member of parliament and community advocate he was. It was an honour for me to attend his funeral on behalf of the government and to have the opportunity to acknowledge the contribution he made as a member of parliament and as a respected member of his community.

He saw what needed to be changed about disadvantage suffered by Indigenous people across all measures of society and set about trying to make a better life for his people. He was a great example to Indigenous people and elected representatives alike. It is incumbent upon all of us to live up to the example he set. Mr Deeral will be sadly missed not just for what he achieved but for what he inspired others who followed him to achieve.