



Speech By  
**Hon. David Crisafulli**


**MEMBER FOR MUNDINGBURRA**

---

Record of Proceedings, 1 April 2014

**MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST**

**Putney, Most Reverend Michael**

 **Hon. DF CRISAFULLI** (Mundingburra—LNP) (Minister for Local Government, Community Recovery and Resilience) (11.11 am): It is not often I rise in this place and wish I had no need to. Today is such an occasion, as I stand to inform the House of the passing of the Most Reverend Michael Putney, Bishop of Townsville, and one of North Queensland's greatest leaders. He was also the much loved uncle of the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, John McVeigh, and we extend our sympathy to his wife, Anita, and family at this time. My city's love for Bishop Putney is shown by the need to stream his funeral and vigil live on YouTube for those who are unable to attend—a first for the Catholic Church. Often in death people are lionised as superhuman, but there is no need to embellish Michael Putney. His life and how he lived it is testament enough. Few people seek so little for themselves and deliver so much for others.

Father Michael Putney was ordained as an auxiliary bishop of Brisbane in 1995 before he became the fifth Bishop of Townsville in January 2001. Very soon after his arrival, we knew we not only had among us a true man of God but a leader without peer. He had a close affinity with the north and all of its people—whatever their race or religion. His ability to adapt to any situation was remarkable. The Bishop's demeanour and conversation was very different when speaking to a group of clergymen than it was when speaking with the likes of some of the north's colourful characters. Larger-than-life businessman Brad Webb springs to mind. Bishop Putney relished the informal, and we loved him for it. There was no challenge that overwhelmed him, including accepting his own mortality. I went to see him when I knew he had terminal cancer. He spent about two minutes entertaining me with his diagnosis before he asked if it was okay if we did not talk about what he saw as the secondary issue behind the list of things he wanted to achieve for the community before he went.

His passion was education, and the expansion of Catholic education in particular. The irony was not lost on me that on the day his death was announced on the front page of the *Townsville Bulletin*—and I must commend the paper for its coverage—the page 5 lead discussed the fall in state school enrolments in the north over recent years while Catholic schools have flourished. This was not by happy circumstance but a result driven by a man who empowered people like Cathy Day and Ross Homer to open schools where populations increased and close them when numbers stagnated, which contrasts with a generation of a lack of proper planning and vision from the state system in our region. While personal gratification was never his motivation, our city must find ways to ensure his legacy is never forgotten. The opening of a secondary school at Southern Cross Catholic School, where my daughters are educated, is just one example of the potential for infrastructure to be named in his honour and I call on my region to begin a conversation on how the legacy of this great man must be properly remembered and never forgotten.

Bishop Putney had a special affinity with the first Australians and was a powerful force for reconciliation. But it is his efforts building bridges across the faith divide that set him apart. As

chairman of the National Council of Churches, he travelled the globe promoting peace. His friendship with two other great northern leaders, Anglican Bishop Bill Ray and Uniting Church Minister Bruce Cornish, was something very special. I know both of them join other members of Townsville's combined churches in thanking God for the gift that he was to all of us. Personally, I thank God for giving us a bishop who loved a glass of wine, and I am not just talking about the blood of Christ. I have some great memories discussing the state of the state shared over a red.

While Townsville still comes to terms with Bishop Putney's sudden passing, we have known for months he was ailing and time was limited. Judging by our shock at his death, none of us could accept the finality of his condition. Townsville's Vicar General, Mick Lowcock, said that his sudden passing was in step with how the Bishop lived. 'He was a man of action,' Father Lowcock said. 'When he saw something that needed to be done, he would work out how to do it.' Bishop Putney was a man of great faith who believed kindness was the most effective way to relieve every man's suffering. His journey here on earth was infused with Christ's message to 'love one another as I have loved you'. Vale, Bishop Michael Putney. Your loss leaves one of the nation's greatest regional cities in mourning. The effect your life has had on Townsville will be felt long after our sadness eases.