




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

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ADJOURNMENT

NAIDOC Week

 **Mrs LAUGA** (Keppel—ALP) (1.22 am): NAIDOC Week is an important opportunity to celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history. It is also a time to highlight the achievements of Indigenous people in our community. The traditional owners of the land which I am very humbled to represent in this place are the Dharumbal and Woppaburra people. Tonight, I pay my respects to their elders, past and present.

Recently, during NAIDOC Week at Emu Park it was an honour and a privilege to march side by side with my Indigenous brothers and sisters. Young children flew the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags proudly. Highly respected elders marched with pride and several generations of Aboriginal people celebrated their culture, their family and their spiritual connection with the land and sea. I felt the emotion, the pride and the passion in the air. Dharumbal elder Aunty Sally Veve gave an impassioned welcome to country. Evelyn Carte talked about her special connection with the land and Deanna Veve did a great job as emcee.

This year's NAIDOC theme is We all Stand on Sacred Ground: Learn, Respect and Celebrate. It highlights the strong spiritual and cultural connection that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have to the land and sea. When I joined a group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people on a walk up Gawula, it was an honour and a privilege to witness firsthand that strong spiritual and cultural connection that the Dharumbal people have with the land. Gawula is just one of the many sacred places in the Central Queensland region that has great significance for the Dharumbal people. Gawula, located in Cawarral, is a place where Indigenous people can go to reflect on stories of their culture and local history. After a 2½ hour almost vertical climb, we reached the apex of the mountain at 400 metres above sea level. Words cannot describe how absolutely beautiful and emotional it was to stand side by side with my Indigenous brothers and sisters and Dharumbal elder Uncle Wade Mann at the top of the mountain, with 360 degree views across Dharumbal country. Uncle Wade told us stories about the Dharumbal people's connection with Gawula, about Bduru, the Dharumbal green tree frog totem, and the rainbow serpent. It took another hour to trek down again, but when we arrived we were greeted by cheers, big smiles and high-fives.

Preserving and promoting Indigenous culture and this spiritual connection to the land and sea, is vitally important. It was an honour to be given the opportunity to climb Gawula as part of NAIDOC Week celebrations, the only time when non-Indigenous people can climb Gawula, and to learn about the importance of Gawula to our local traditional owners. I thank the traditional owners for sharing their stories and this sacred place with us.