



Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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MOTION OF CONFIDENCE

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (9.40 pm): Mr Speaker, I commence my address tonight by congratulating you on your appointment. I also congratulate the Premier, her executive team and the ministers on their appointment. I am deeply honoured and humbled to have been elected as the member for Burdekin and I am mindful of the trust and faith put in me by the wonderful people who live in this electorate to be their representative in the 55th Parliament of Queensland.

My journey here today started in the cane fields of Bundaberg where I grew up. My family has retained that connection to this day with sugar cane and cattle. You could say that my character was shaped by working and living in a rural environment where the ability to work hard all day without complaint was the yardstick by which you were measured. At various times throughout my life I have been a lucerne farmer, a grazier, a yard builder and a contract musterer. So my connection with the land has never left me.

I spent 25 years in the Queensland Police Service, living and working throughout regional and rural Queensland, finishing as the officer in charge of Townsville Police Station, one of the largest 24-hour stations in Queensland. It is in the Police Service that I started to specialise in disaster management. My specialisation was further developed when I was an area director with Emergency Management Queensland, which allowed me to play a key role in some of Queensland's largest disasters. It was during my time in the Queensland Police Service that I realised that I wanted a role that allowed me to shape the future, to provide opportunities and growth for our communities and a more secure future for our children.

I successfully contested the 2008 local government elections and I liken my time as a councillor and deputy mayor with Townsville City Council as an apprenticeship for this role. It was during this time that I truly began to appreciate the faith and trust placed in elected representatives by the community and the expectation to deliver results. This appreciation was further enhanced in my most recent role as regional manager for Palm Island, where I was responsible for the delivery of the job services and school attendance contracts on behalf of the Australian government. Our achievement in raising the school attendance level on Palm Island from 60 per cent to 85 per cent is one that I am inordinately proud of and is indicative of the staff's dedication to walk forward with their community.

Through my diversity of careers I have gained a passion for community safety, educating our children and giving people a fair go. I am not about handouts; I am about giving people a hand up. Those fundamental principles of hard work, equality and mateship serve as a constant reminder to me of what it means to be an Australian. During the campaign I knocked on the doors of many hardworking, decent and honest people throughout the Burdekin electorate—people on whose back this great country was built. We owe it to them to provide hope and opportunity.

There is no other electorate in Queensland like Burdekin. The diversity and opportunities that exist in this electorate are second to none. I want to take some time to run through some of those industries and opportunities. The Burdekin electorate stretches from the southern suburbs of

Townsville to Mount Coolon in the south-west and incorporates the towns of Ayr, Home Hill, Bowen and Collinsville.

The Burdekin electorate incorporates the largest military base in Australia, Lavarack Barracks, which is home to some 3,500 personnel and a major contributor to the Townsville economy. Sun Metals Corporation's zinc refinery, Glencore's Townsville copper refinery and the JBS abattoir at Stuart collectively employ 1,060 employees and are a vital component of the northern end of the electorate. When you couple this facility with an additional abattoir planned for construction at Calcium west of Townsville, creating some 300 to 450 jobs upon completion, and a proposed large scale cattle export facility nearby to be delivered by Wellards, you see that the beef sector has a bright future in this area. The 4,900-hectare Townsville State Development area at Stuart on the southern outskirts of the city is poised to become the industrial hub of the city, creating up to 2,000 jobs by 2027. The announcement last week by Glencore to lodge an application with Townsville City Council to develop 81 hectares of this land was indeed welcome news.

The Australian Institute of Marine Science, located south of Townsville, is Australia's tropical marine research agency and is responsible for generating and transferring knowledge to support the sustainable use and protection of tropical marine environments. The institute's focus on tropical regions is a response to a growing need for high-quality science to support Australia's maritime industries and also to support the protection of environmental assets such as the Great Barrier Reef, Ningaloo Reef and our coastal ecosystem. The institute has three research programs, each internationally recognised for their innovative, world-class scientific and technological research. The institute is home to the National Sea Simulator. With a budget of \$33 million and a staff of 210, the institute is a major contributor to the region.

The Burdekin electorate also has the Kakadu of Queensland in the Cromarty-Clevedon Wetlands at Wongaloo Regional Park, which is located some 50 kilometres south of Townsville. This hidden gem features the only remaining lowland rainforest in Australia and has long been recognised as a critical wildlife, waterfowl and flora habitat for numerous local and migratory species. It is my vision to secure the ongoing development of this park and to market it as both a tourism destination and educational habitat for our schoolchildren.

When we talk about the Burdekin electorate we immediately conjure up images of the rolling cane fields that are the foundation blocks of the Burdekin. The Burdekin is the largest sugar-producing area in Australia, with the Burdekin Falls Dam providing much needed water for irrigation throughout the district. In 2014, a total of 8.06 million tonnes of cane was crushed at Wilmar's four Burdekin mills. Based on early estimates, the 2015 crop is expected to be more than 8.2 million tonnes. Yes, the Burdekin is the largest sugar-producing area in Australia. However, our cane farmers are facing a bleak and uncertain future with rising electricity and water costs, sugar marketing issues and insurance premiums having a significant impact on the industry.

As you move further south you enter the horticultural areas of Bowen-Gumlu. This region contributes more than \$400 million to the \$9 billion Australian horticulture sector. It is the largest winter-growing region in Australia and employs around 3,200 skilled and unskilled workers each year. Amazingly, during the months of September and October each year this region produces 90 per cent of the tomatoes and 95 per cent of the capsicums for all of Australia.

A growing industry in the electorate is the production of rice. With its climate and secure access to water, the Burdekin region is regarded as one of the most promising rice-growing areas outside of the Riverina. There are now two crops per year—a dry season and a wet season crop—with average yields of eight tonnes per hectare. At present, there is 280 hectares under rice in the Burdekin, with plans for a significant expansion to 900 hectares in the coming year. It is anticipated that the mill at Brandon in the Burdekin will process 14,000 tonnes of rice for the 2016 year, which is a truly great achievement for this industry.

The Burdekin has an established aquaculture industry, with Pacific Reef Fisheries comprising two sites, one at Ayr and one at Guthalungra. The industry is set to expand in the Burdekin, with plans for export to the South-East Asian market. Pacific Reef Fisheries is now capable of growing over 1,000 tonnes of premium black tiger prawns and North Queensland cobia annually.

The Burdekin electorate is unique in that it contains a mix of coal, metals and coal seam gas. There are a number of mines in the electorate, including two QCoal owned coalmines, Sonoma Mine and Cows Mine, with Drake Mine processing using existing infrastructure at Sonoma; the Collinsville Coal Mine owned by Glencore; and the Evolution goldmine at Mount Carlton.

There are 993 full-time employees, not including contractors, directly employed by the sector, with flow-on contributions of \$186 million in the Burdekin electorate, including the creation of some 2,340 full-time positions. Importantly, only 0.2 per cent land disturbance is noted in the electorate

because of mining. There is massive potential in the resources sector and if we are fair dinkum about growing our economy and providing jobs in this state we need to work with the mining companies to continue to grow this industry. We all know that the creation of jobs in Queensland is a priority and I cannot stress how important it is for the future of towns like Bowen and Collinsville that projects such as the redevelopment of the Abbot Point Coal Terminal and proposed developments in the adjacent Galilee Basin go ahead. The people who live in these towns are hurting. I am witnessing businesses closing daily and a growing line of people seeking help at the local Neighbourhood Centre. If we do not do something soon I fear there will be a mass exodus of residents from these communities, which would be devastating for the region. The people who live in these areas have turned to the government for help and I for one will not let them down.

So what is my vision for the electorate? I could best sum it up by saying 'just add water'. No, it is not ready-mix cement, but a reference to the opportunities that exist in the Burdekin electorate due to both the current supply and potential opportunities for water storage. Of course we are home to the mighty Burdekin Falls Dam and the benefits that brings to the area in terms of agriculture, but what if I were to say that we could double that area. We have one of the best dam locations in Australia in terms of the Urannah Dam. It ticks all the boxes in terms of approvals, has a storage capacity of 150 million megalitres, covers a land area one quarter of the size of the Burdekin Falls Dam and is encompassed within a single land holding. The water from this facility could potentially irrigate 30,000 hectares of land around Collinsville, provide water for new mine developments in the Bowen and Galilee basins and a top-up capacity for the Burdekin Falls Dam. The second part of that is the Elliott Main Channel, which would utilise water from the Burdekin Falls Dam to irrigate land from Home Hill to Bowen and, importantly, provide water for the Abbot Point State Development Area. Can members imagine the agricultural production, jobs and boost to the Queensland economy that these projects would deliver. As I said, 'just add water'.

In terms of major projects for my electorate, I would like to see the completion of the upgrades to the Bruce Highway that were identified by the Bruce Highway Transport Advisory Committee. A new bridge across the Haughton River and a second bridge crossing over the Burdekin are seen as imperative. The Bruce Highway is the artery that keeps the north alive, particularly during times of disaster, and it is vital we prioritise these projects to ensure that we keep that artery open. I would also like to see Stuart Drive in Townsville upgraded and a second bridge constructed across the Ross River to ease the growing traffic congestion and complete that missing link in this road.

We all know about the dilemma facing Queenslanders in terms of electricity prices and it is pleasing to see RATCH-Australia Corporation's plans for a 42 megawatt solar PV project coming to fruition, with an additional 36 megawatt facility proposed for installation on an adjoining property at Collinsville. On the subject of power, it is my submission that the only logical place for a new base load power station in North Queensland is Collinsville. The infrastructure is in place, all environmental approvals have been finalised, the site is located adjacent to a coalmine and, most importantly, the people of Collinsville want it.

Queensland needs jobs and what I am offering here today is a solution to the dilemma that currently faces us. With the right political will, a healthy dose of vision and some good old-fashioned hard work the mighty Burdekin electorate can go a long way to solving the jobs crisis in Queensland. We need courageous and visionary decisions, free of influence from the radical elements in our community, to ensure our future prosperity. I am here to tell members that we are ready to go. I have a clear focus on productivity, job growth and sustainable development, particularly in North Queensland and our regional areas such as the Burdekin. Now is not the time to baulk or ponder the next move; it is time to deliver, to make the tough decisions and create the opportunities that take us forward.

My election as the member for Burdekin would not have been possible without the support and guidance of some key people. I want to thank my campaign team headed up by Jim Gist; the former member for Burdekin, Rosemary Menkens, and her husband Ray; Jane McNamara and all those volunteers and branch members who helped in some way in getting me elected. I also want to thank my three brothers, Rodney, Greg and Steven and their families and my former work colleagues for their belief and support. Finally and most importantly I want to thank my beautiful partner, Kim, and my children, Jack, Molly, Rachel and Jonathan. Their inspiration is what drives me to make a difference. Kim's level-headedness, support and undying belief in me during the campaign is the reason I am standing here today. I dedicate the next three years to the people of the Burdekin electorate; to advancing their aspirations and delivering those projects and services that will truly make a difference, not only to their lives but to the lives of their children. In short, I want the Burdekin electorate to be all it can be and to create a better future for us all.