




Speech By
Mark Furner

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

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MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Mr FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (4.24 pm): It is with gratitude, pride and humbleness that I find myself delivering this speech—my first in this historic place in this 55th Parliament. May I extend my congratulations to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, on your appointment. I congratulate the Speaker, the Hon. Peter Wellington, the member for Nicklin, on his appointment as Speaker. I had heard a lot about the Speaker, but I have only got to know the gentleman since I have arrived here. I find him a man of integrity, respect and honour. It is a pleasure to assist him and you at stages during the sittings as a deputy speaker.

As the member for Ferny Grove, I acknowledge the traditional owners of the area where we meet today and also of the Ferny Grove electorate—the Turrbal and Garumngar people and the associated clans. I also congratulate my fellow parliamentary colleagues for their success in taking up positions in this House. It is never an easy task to be elected to parliament. I know for each and every one of us it is a great achievement and we did it with the best endeavours and for the right reasons.

Additionally, I sincerely thank the people of Ferny Grove for their confidence and support in entrusting me with this opportunity to serve them in the Queensland government. This opportunity is not taken lightly by me and I shall do my very best to respect the wishes of the Ferny Grove constituency without fear or favour.

This is only the seventh change of government in Queensland's history since 1915 and only the third time since 1932 that a sitting government in the state has failed to win a second term. I consider myself privileged to have been elected the fourth member for Ferny Grove since the inception of the seat in 1992. Glenn Milliner became the first member for Ferny Grove under the Goss Labor government.

Subsequently, Geoff Wilson became the member from 1998—during the time of the Beattie-Bligh Labor governments—until 2012 when the seat swung for the first time to the LNP's Dale Shuttleworth. I acknowledge all three members for their time as past members. In particular, it would be remiss of me not to mention the incredible level of support for Geoff Wilson residents indicated to me while doorknocking. His legacy is quite substantial.

It is an amazing feat to not only be elected to parliament but also to be elected on a second occasion. I do not take that opportunity lightly. It is a humbling experience to have that opportunity once again.

I join two Labor senators, former senators Mullan and Ferricks, who both served in the Commonwealth parliament and the Queensland parliament. Both served in the Queensland parliament prior to serving in the Commonwealth parliament but returned to the state following their federal terms. I believe I am the only senator who has come from the Senate to the state parliament. Therefore, in my view and from my research, I am making history.

Missing the opportunity in the 2013 federal election to be returned to the Australian Senate, my focus turned to the possibility of becoming the next member for Ferny Grove. Incumbency always has an advantage so I never once took for granted the chance of success. Notwithstanding this, with my ethic of hard work I knew that if I committed myself to the campaign rather than accept employment post June 2014 my chances of winning would be enhanced. I knew I had to listen to the residents of Ferny Grove and I set out to doorknock most of the electorate six days a week in the sun and rain—meeting as many people as possible.

Although I had doorknocked houses in the lead-up to the 2007 and 2013 federal elections with little effect, my concentration on Ferny Grove needed to be measured and effective. I started in Keperra in June, completing the entire suburb by July. Next came Arana Hills and Ferny Hills. Developing a scattered approach, I systematically moved into Ferny Grove, Samford Village and Upper Kedron in the lead-up to Christmas and the new year. In total, by January 2015 I had personally doorknocked 9,292 homes.

Along with assistance from our incredible campaign team, we delivered interactions with 16,958 residents. These interactions were varied. However, they were consistent in many respects, providing valuable research throughout the campaign. I could not help the reality of being warmly received on the doorsteps by the residents of Ferny Grove and their goodwill and their astonishment of a budding politician making the effort to come to their home. Leading into the summer period, there were quite copious opportunities to offer glasses of water, and you can only take so much water in before it comes out.

Equally the astounding commonality of many wanting to see a change in government or on many occasions a change in the Premier was quite extraordinary. Key issues identified whilst doorknocking were: job cuts; asset sales; attacks on nurses, teachers, doctors, ambos, correctional officers, the judicial fraternity, public servants and motorcycle riders; the management of the economy; the lack of respect for our environment; the Upper Kedron development; and defence concerns.

I turn to a letter recently provided to me. It is from a public servant written post the election after receiving a letter from Premier Palaszczuk. I was handed a copy and I would like to read it into *Hansard*. The public servant says—

I just wanted to share this with you. The response to Anastacia's letter by all of the public servants I know has been incredible. The relief felt by all of my colleagues has brought some people to tears.

I don't think Anastacia will ever know just how much this letter has meant. No-one expected it but it was so genuinely appreciated. Such a welcome approach after what we have all been through in the last 3 years.

Looking at these concerns raised sequentially, I inform the House accordingly. I turn first to the issue of jobs. All of us should realise the morale, integrity and confidence a job provides to the community, the economy, the family and so on. The previous government unsurprisingly continued down the path of previously elected conservative governments under the architecture of the former treasurer Peter Costello and cut to the bone—24,000 jobs gone in the space of under three years.

Many a household invited me into their homes to tell me their stories and that of their partners, or their children, who had faced the cruel axe of the Newman government. One such Ferny Grove family of senior residents told me the sad story of their three adult children whose jobs had all been terminated by the previous government and only one of those three children had been able to find employment since.

When Campbell Newman compared Queensland to being the Spain of Australia in 2012 shortly after being elected, his hyperbolic claim started a spiral of confidence in our economy descending towards ground zero. This can be best explained while campaigning for the 2013 federal election in Hervey Bay whilst outside a local florist. I asked the owner how business was of late. Her response was, 'Business has been terrible since the election of the Newman government.' Simply put, she credibly indicated that people were not spending because of the job cuts and fears about the direction the economy was heading in.

I turn to the issue of asset sales. Despite the change of tack by the prior government to change their language from asset sales to asset leases, I found no willingness for what people determined was a con—\$70 million of wasted taxpayers' advertising and consultation had failed to convince an intelligent public they wanted to maintain government assets. Even Jeff Seeney in 2010 claimed, 'Leases are a dishonest, sneaky way to undertake asset sales.'

I turn to the issue of the environment. With the experience and knowledge of having been a senator on the Senate Economics Committee's inquiry into the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme

and on the Senate select committee's inquiry into climate change, I accept the volatility Mother Nature has on our beautiful state and believe that if we do address climate change we will face irreversible consequences for future generations to come.

I have also been fortunate in my past to have persuaded former Family First senator Fielding in 2010 by taking him to the Wenlock River in the cape to see firsthand the fragile and beauty of our state's rivers—rivers in the firing line of a private member's bill of Tony Abbott, who was hell-bent on allowing second grade bauxite mining on the wetland springs of this beautiful country. With the backing of this former senator in the Senate, we were able to defeat the Abbott bill. However, this win was short-lived, with the Newman government assisting his good friend Tony Abbott reach his dreams by rolling back the wild rivers legislation.

I reflect on positions taken while campaigning in 2013 in Bowen over the Abbot Point dredging concerns. There was a broad exchange of ideas from a whole variety of locals about this particular issue—some were for and some were against—notwithstanding that that was within days of an elected Labor government and a solution, which I understand reaches the consensus of most, to dump the dredged spoils on T2 next to the existing terminal, not on the Caley Valley wetlands or within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. Under the LNP's plan, proposals to dump more than 10 million cubic metres of dredge spoil could have gone ahead. I am informed by a traditional owner, an elder of the Juru people—Ross Williams, a gentleman I doorknocked and who has since joined the Labor Party—that the decision is welcomed by the people to minimise the impact on the reef, cultural heritage and environmental integrity.

I turn now to defence concerns. The Ferny Grove electorate has high number of ADF members and families living in many parts—mostly Army; however, some Air Force. I know this is a federal issue but you get a whole host of issues raised with you when you doorknock, as you would know, Madam Deputy Speaker Grace. While having some relationship with defence personnel having previously been chair of the Defence Sub-Committee in my prior capacity as a Queensland senator, I found opportunities while doorknocking to converse with them. I have been fortunate over that time to have spent time in Afghanistan in 2011, on the oceans both in the Coral Sea on Armidale patrol boats and in the middle of the Pacific Ocean on board the HMAS *Darwin* overnight, in the air in a P3 Orion above Ashmore Reef, and on many countless ADF bases throughout our nation and abroad, with many of our professional men and women of the ADF.

Despite having this diverse knowledge and relationship with the ADF, nothing prepared me for the various concerns expressed to me by ADF members and their families while visiting them in their homes, bearing in mind that around that time, in late 2014, was when the current federal government had decided to stand by in silence when the Defence Remuneration Tribunal handed down its paltry increase of 1.5 per cent per annum to their salary and cut their conditions of entitlements. Rather than rely upon my experience, I refer to an article on news.com.au entitled 'Why I'm ashamed to be an Australian Soldier'. It reads—

The 31-year-old soldier, who has requested to remain anonymous has served with the Australian Defence Force for 11 years across Australia as well as serving in Afghanistan.

...

"They have given us a 'pay rise' of 1.5% for the next few years. This is more than 1.5% below estimated inflation, and 140% less than the pay rise that politicians have awarded themselves in past years.

...

"My own government disdains me and my fellow serving members, and it disdains us publicly and with thinly disguised contempt.

"I am an Australia Soldier and, for the first time in eleven years, I am thoroughly disgusted to be one."

We need to provide more and do better for our serving ADF, people who sacrifice so much in our community and sacrifice so much for our country and their own families.

There was biased debate in this House in the week of the opening of parliament regarding the two-party preferred outcomes in the election. The two-party preferred result was Labor on 51.1 per cent and the LNP on 48.9 per cent, representing a two-party preferred swing to Labor of 14 per cent since 2012. This is the voting system we have in Queensland—a system that has been in place for many years; a system, regardless of the outcome of any election, we should accept and move on.

I now turn to the Ferny Grove election issues. Notwithstanding the election result, the Palmer United Party candidate for Ferny Grove, Mark Taverner, was revealed to be an undischarged bankrupt and was therefore ineligible to run. This spurred speculation that there may need to be a by-election to resolve the seat. I became aware of further hubris of the LNP with measures of

conducting a mail-out to all Ferny Grove electors indicating it was business as usual and a by-election was imminent. This was followed up by, as I understand, the LNP engaging a market research company to phone residents of Ferny Grove randomly to question my credentials and to mislead as to my character to influence people should there be a by-election.

The Electoral Commission of Queensland initially released a statement on 8 February saying that it would declare the seat and then refer the issue to the Supreme Court of Queensland sitting as the Court of Disputed Returns. ABC election analyst Antony Green believed that the Ferny Grove outcome and possible by-election would not have had an impact on who formed government.

I recall reading Professor Graeme Orr, an electoral law expert at the University of Queensland, labelling the prospects of the LNP maintaining a caretaker government until a possible by-election comparable to a constitutional coup. Professor Orr also reasoned that the laws and facts were against the Ferny Grove by-election. The Ferny Grove tally later indicated that PUP candidate Taverner did not have an effect on the outcome of the election, destroying any chances of the Court of Disputed Returns ordering a by-election. On 13 February the Electoral Commission of Queensland stated that, based on legal advice, it would not be referring the Ferny Grove result to the Court of Disputed Returns. This result cleared the way for a Labor Palaszczuk government with the support of the now Speaker, Peter Wellington. Despite a period of uncertainty and desperate measures the LNP used during the election, particularly in Ferny Grove, good government has been restored to Queensland.

During the three-week election campaign, the previous Ferny Grove LNP member provided nothing but false expectations to the electorate, promising unfunded millions of outcomes which were never provided for in forward budget estimates. These included road upgrades to Main Street in Samford Village, school hall upgrades to Patricks Road State School and unfunded assistance for the Grovely State School car park. All promises were signed off on blank cheques which could never be cashed other than by the sales of our assets—a proposition rejected by the residents of Ferny Grove and the majority of Queensland.

I turn to campaign assistance. All parliamentary members in this place know we do not get elected because of our good looks or our charming personalities. I, for one, knew I needed help if I wanted to be the member for Ferny Grove. I extend my gratitude to the many who helped me through the campaign trail. I thank my federal parliamentary friends—federal opposition leader Bill Shorten and opposition leader in the Senate, Senator Penny Wong. Both without hesitation agreed to help in the lead-up to and during the three weeks of the campaign proper.

I thank all those senators who contributed to my election and believed in me winning: Senators Moore, Bilyk, McEwen, Peris—Nova even came up on election day and helped hand out how-to-votes in the electorate—Polley, Bullock and Ketter. Even former president of the Senate, John Hogg, assisted me whacking in street signs and working on the pre-poll booth. Additionally, I thank House of Representatives members Chris Bowen, Tony Burke, Shayne Neumann, Nick Champion, Laurie Ferguson and Joel Fitzgibbon.

Branch members and volunteers, the backbone of any campaign and salt of the earth, were there when we needed them the most. I thank Matt Weatherby and Ali and Cam Gibbs. I must tell you a little bit about the Gibbs. They have a folk band called the Firedrakes. I believe it was the only street stall where there was folk music playing on the streets of Ferny Grove. It was a delight to be part of this campaign and have them playing their fantastic music. I also thank Matt and Sheila Siggins; Sheridan Power and Kerry O'Connor, now two of my very best friends; Col and Julienne Kay; Margaret and Brian Gagen; John Slaven; Kay Herrington; Ross and Linda Williams; Hanne Worsoe; Simone Flemming; Geoff Mackay, who was an inspiration and such a help hammering in street signs; Hugh Childers; Simon Crank; and Graham Theaker.

Past Ferny Grove members of parliament, Glen Milliner and Geoff Wilson, helped immensely with their knowledge and astute political awareness of the electorate. Notwithstanding those I have mentioned, can I thank all members and volunteers—some of whom I met while doorknocking who have since become members of Labor. You are the heart and soul of the Labor movement.

In leaving the best for last, I thank my campaign manager, Laurence Brown, his wife, Judi, and son, Will. The thing about the Brown family is that when you get one you get the whole package: Laurence, with his meticulous detail to everything and relentless stamina, even when he was struck down with a summer flu; Judi's attention to detail, ensuring all fundraising events ran like clockwork; and Will, always there eager to help with anything. Thank you to the Brown family.

In addition to branch member support, the union movement is never backwards in coming forward. I thank Neil Henderson from the Services Union; Peter Biagini from the Transport Workers Union; Ben Swan from the Australian Workers Union; Chris Gazenbeek from the Shop, Distributive

and Allied Employees' Association; John Oliver from the United Firefighters Union Queensland; the Queensland Teachers' Union; and the CFMEU for all their assistance. It comes as no surprise to anyone on this side of the chamber that I hold a proud union heritage. I was an organiser with the Transport Workers Union, Queensland branch, an industrial officer followed by an official with the Queensland Police Union of Employees, and later the secretary of the National Union of Workers Queensland prior to entering the federal Senate.

A big thankyou to my family: Lorraine, for putting up with another opportunity in politics; my daughters, Stacey and Sally, for helping out during the campaign; and Troy for coming down on election day from Cairns to be with me and the rest of the family on this journey. I also extend my appreciation to the Queensland Labor Party—in particular, Evan Moorhead, Anthony Chisholm and Jon Persley for their commitment throughout the campaign. Since being elected I have engaged with many community organisations: at Samford Rural Fire Brigade I have been accepted as a brigade member, keenly by Allan Wells and the rest of the committed members; Samford Riding for the Disabled; Tramway Museum; Ferny Fireballs Cricket Club; Ferny Grove Falcons Junior AFL Club; Keperra Neighbourhood Watch; and Samford Area Men's Shed, to name just a few. I am also proud to be the patron of the Ferny Grove Bowls Club and the Kupidabin Wilderness Cultural Association. I keenly look forward to representing the people of Ferny Grove. Once again, I sincerely thank them for their support, trust and opportunity to be their parliamentary representative.

(Time expired)