




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (7.58 pm): In being afforded the opportunity to make my contribution to the address-in-reply debate, I take this opportunity to say to all of our supporters and our army of volunteers that I am incredibly grateful and acknowledge that, without your help, I would not be here today. You gently guided us in the right direction through a tumultuous campaign. I want to acknowledge Burnett chair Christine Tyson and her husband, Ken; Childers branch chair Bill Trevor, who provided wise advice and a trusted ear; my neighbour, friend and campaign director Geoff Campbell, whose energy and drive was boundless during the campaign; and all of those members, new and old, and supporters of the Liberal National Party branches, including those members of our new Coral Coast branch, who put much into the campaign.

I acknowledge today our significant increase in branch membership and our three branches that we have strengthened and consolidated. The address-in-reply always provides a time to reflect, and I would like to mention my good mate Robert Edgar, Jain Henriksen, Peter Hoffman and the terrific and fantastic staff I work with every day, Kath and Melinda. Of course, I take this opportunity to acknowledge my wife, Fiona, my three children and my granddaughter, who make it all worthwhile. I must also thank my friends, those members of my Rotary Club, the Bundaberg Sunrise Club, who do not have any political affiliations but who offered to help as well, as did the many members of the public who walked in off the street and asked what they could do to preserve the tremendous reforms that we had delivered for the electorate and the region.

I acknowledge my community's expectations. I feel a strong sense of responsibility to the people of Burnett and the Bundaberg region, representing them as I do as their member. I am committed to those people of Bundaberg who now face significant challenges. I know the people of the region put their trust in me because I love the Burnett electorate. We love the lifestyle that we have, we love our unique environment and we need to work to preserve it for future generations. I see it as my task in this place to work for the region's prosperity and to repay the faith that the people of my electorate have put in me through my commitment to them. In doing that, I intend to be governed by the examples and philosophies that I have referred to in this address-in-reply, particularly with honour and with a special regard for those people who present to my office needing assistance.

Those of us who have made the journey to parliament share many common ideals and make significant sacrifices, but we are privileged. In the main, we are committed to the institution of parliamentary democracy. We also have our own visions and we have heard many speeches made about a better future for our state and the wellbeing of our fellow Queenslanders. Those visions vary, as do our philosophies and the policies we would pursue to achieve them. It is my aim to work to achieve the very best for the Bundaberg and Burnett regions and for Queensland.

In being entrusted with the role of shadow minister for the environment, I would like to highlight some important regulatory reforms that were delivered by the previous government to make Queensland a better place. I acknowledge the work of former minister Powell. Those reforms include

investing \$35 million each year to improve water quality, including support for graziers and canegrowers to develop best farm management programs; investing \$8 million a year into the joint field management program for the reef, which is responsible for day-to-day operations; investing millions to help control excessive numbers of crown-of-thorns starfish; undertaking a strategic assessment of the Great Barrier Reef coastal zone, the largest ever strategic assessment undertaken for a natural system; developing the new Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan, guiding the protection and management of the reef for the next 35 years; establishing the Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership to ensure open, honest and accountable management of the harbour and investing \$4 million towards the partnership; releasing the Queensland Ports Strategy, restricting port development to the major long-established ports of Townsville, Abbot Point, Hay Point/Mackay and Gladstone as recommended by UNESCO; announcing the Abbot Point Port and Wetlands Strategy, a long-term plan for development of the Abbot Point Port; investing \$9 million to implement a buyout of the east coast net fishery, which will provide conservation benefits and improve the profitability of the fishery ensuring sustainability and, more importantly, dignity for the industry; and implementing a \$1 million, five-year project to promote the effective management of wetlands in the Great Barrier Reef catchment. I acknowledge and thank all the ministers who were involved in the development of those policies. Other reforms of the previous government include managing the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area to international standards and working with UNESCO to make sure that we had new conservation and management initiatives and introducing the toughest laws ever to protect the reef by formally recognising the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area as an area of special significance, meaning that any individual or corporation causing serious environmental harm will be charged under the most serious offences.

Of course, I also emphasise the work done on the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan, which was released by the federal Minister for the Environment, the Hon. Greg Hunt MP. This is a 35-year plan that outlines how the Great Barrier Reef will be able to sustain its World Heritage status and maintain the outstanding values that supported its listing over 30 years ago. I also acknowledge the \$100 million that has been entrusted to the Reef Trust to support further water quality outcomes.

I am happy to advise the House that the achievements that I have outlined have seen the Great Barrier Reef's coral and seagrasses blooming again. That is because of the strategies that were implemented as part of the former government's repair job. It is good to see those strategies starting to take effect. Those findings are revealed in an Australian Institute of Marine Science report, which confirms that the health of the reef is improving. The report's results are at the heart of the United Nations World Heritage Committee's investigation into Australia's care of the planet's greatest coral reef. We need to acknowledge the influence that the weather has on the reef, such as cyclones, and water quality improvements that have taken place over many years but, importantly, we need to undertake better land management. I must again highlight, particularly to the members opposite, that we must work with the agricultural sector and the resources sector and not demonise them.

With the wonders of the Southern Great Barrier Reef being in the Burnett electorate, such as Lady Elliot and Lady Musgrave islands and the many reefs, I welcome the continuation of funding for reef protection. For those members who have never been to the Southern Great Barrier Reef, I encourage them to make the effort to do so. Lady Elliot Island can be easily accessed by air and Lady Musgrave Island can be accessed by catamaran. I will be on Lady Elliot Island this weekend to further promote that wonderful, iconic place.

We know that canegrowers and horticulturists are supportive of the intent of the plan, which needs both the Australian and Queensland governments to continue to support the positive actions that the sugarcane industry and the agricultural industry is taking that deliver water quality outcomes for the reef while also improving productivity. We need to foster business growth to ensure continuing employment in rural and regional Queensland.

I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the previous member for Bundaberg, Jack Dempsey. Jack Dempsey and I helped to improve front-line services and continued to reduce unnecessary red tape. In Queensland, the incidence of crime is down. We now have the education system that our kids deserve. In the last financial year, \$24 million was secured for our local hospitals to access quality health care. Throughout the past three years, Jack and I continued to work towards revitalising the Bundaberg Port to provide greater certainty for industry. Part of that process was ensuring that we invest in infrastructure. We committed \$11 million to construct a new gas pipeline to provide gas to households and businesses in the region. Importantly, that provides for local jobs and opportunities for local businesses to grow. That approximately 25-kilometre pipeline will attract new industries to create around 100 new full-time jobs and 600 indirect jobs.

I am especially proud of what we have been able to achieve for our local health care, with the Wide Bay and Burnett area registering as the best performer in significantly reducing surgery wait lists in the country. The number of nurses, doctors and health professionals employed by the LNP government to operate the Wide Bay Hospital and Health Service increased by 79 additional staff. Today, there are 2,232 locals employed as clinical staff. At the Bundaberg Hospital, the number of nurses, doctors and health professionals employed by the LNP government has increased by 71 additional staff. Today, there are 827 locals employed as clinical staff. A newly built palliative care unit means that families can be close to their seriously ill loved ones. Also, there was an \$18m local cancer and oral health facility to double treatment capacity.

Bundaberg Hospital can now boast having the best performing emergency department in Queensland, ensuring that all patients are seen on time, every time, across-the-board. The hospital treated 91.43 per cent of its ED patients within four hours, which is the national standard. This figure exceeded the state's national benchmarks and was a rise from 76 per cent during the same period in 2013. Bundaberg Hospital was the best performer. There are now no category 1, 2 or 3 patients at Bundaberg Hospital waiting beyond the clinically recommended time frame. That meets the national elective surgery target and shows clearly the high standard of health administration that is in effect in Bundaberg. It is a magnificent effort by our hardworking doctors, nurses and administration and all the staff there. The Wide Bay Hospital and Health Service had delivered this boost in performance against a wide range of key indicators and, more importantly, while operating within its \$188.5 million budget.

In 2012, the top concern of the residents of the Burnett electorate was the condition of their local roads and the associated safety issues. We moved quickly to deliver \$20 million for the upgrade of the Isis Highway, half a million dollars for road safety at Apple Tree Creek, \$3.1m to improve Bucca Road's flood resilience, a permanent solution for Lockett's Road and \$4.5 million for the Apple Tree Creek intersections.

I would also like to highlight some other projects: the Elliott Heads kiosk and the Mon Repos visitors centre. It was very important that we provided a grant to Friends of Parks to make sure that we can improve the visitor experience to view the loggerhead turtles at the Mon Repos visitors centre. Other tourism initiatives such as the Childers Festival and the 1770 Captain Cook Festival were supported with funding. We secured a new Miriam Vale Ambulance Station, along with new fire trucks for Bargara, Woodgate and Childers, and \$3.1 million to improve Bucca Road's flood resilience during extreme weather conditions. The naval cadet unit, TS Bundaberg, had its flood damaged boat ramp repaired. The Burnett Heads State School received money for a new playground. The Burnett Heads kindy did not miss out either. There was \$1.8 million under the Great Results Guarantee for 26 schools in the Burnett electorate to boost student outcomes and \$500,000 to rebuild flood damaged boat ramps across the region. I was also very happy to be able to deliver the Fairymead boat ramp, which had been promised for many years by the previous Bligh government.

With reference to the Queensland Police Service and the best police minister in decades, we provided 800 additional police on the beat over three years, 2,850 real-time devices with technology allowing police to do their job quickly without all the desk work, rapid action policing hubs and highly visible proactive task forces that can stay longer on the beat, cracking down on crime. In Queensland, the incidence of crime is down 12 per cent. Again, I acknowledge the previous police minister, the Hon. Jack Dempsey.

My region is particularly pleased with the investment in education. Principals and school communities are being empowered to decide funding allocations. We acknowledge that every school is unique. We also acknowledge the importance of the Great Results Guarantee. Funding to remove the maintenance backlog ensures that students and teachers now have the facilities they expect and deserve. Burnett schools were allocated \$4.5 million to fix their neglected maintenance backlog, which included peeling paint, asbestos, walkways et cetera. Along with the \$1.38 million Great Results Guarantee to boost literacy and numeracy and new master teachers in our local schools, our children are getting the great start they deserve.

In relation to flood recovery funding after the tragedy suffered in the Bundaberg region, \$174 million in state and federal government funding was approved for Bundaberg Regional Council to restore community infrastructure that was affected by ex-tropical cyclones Tasha and Oswald. This includes \$15 million for 18 betterment projects to build infrastructure to a higher standard to improve resilience. Having so far completed more than 90 per cent of its restoration program, council is also contributing funds towards many of these projects. The state LNP's signature Royalties for the Regions program, which Labor is proposing to axe, has been vital to the Bundaberg region's recovery. We are very worried about a few projects that look like they will not be funded. We want to ensure that construction of flood levees in North Bundaberg and the stabilisation of a large section of

the Burnett River bank continues. It appears that one significant road project that would have provided safety outcomes for a local school in the Bundaberg region will now not go ahead. Both levels of government have provided \$240,000 for an early warning network of river and rain gauges to provide real-time information to notify local residents and \$225,000 has been allocated for flood plain monitoring of the lower Burnett River, Kolan River and Gin Gin Creek. I want the region to know we have more to do. We need to conclude the Mon Repos visitor centre to ensure year-round visitation. Flood mitigation needs to be delivered, not another inquiry. Horticulture and agriculture remain a real and tangible part of the region and we need to ensure their future viability.

Over the last four years I have travelled from one end of my electorate to the other and over the majority of the state having regular meetings and I have heard loud and clear that people still want governments to deal with waste in government and stop taxpayers' money being wasted. I always take the opportunity to remind Queenslanders of the state's finances just three short years ago: the unsustainable debt position and the debt levels being at unprecedented levels. Most Queenslanders acknowledge the Labor Party government's \$80 billion debt and certainly understand the ramifications of paying \$4 billion every year in debt interest. What we have to do in this place is make sure that we do not allow unsustainable spending and debt to creep back into policy platforms. This side of the House understands that well-planned infrastructure delivered in a timely manner is vital to our economy. It also facilitates service delivery to regional Queensland and provides long-term employment and opportunities for training and development.

In relation to construction, the LNP government had simplified planning processes and reformed assistance for first home buyers. Dwelling approvals are 35 per cent higher than they were three years ago. The resource sector has seen significant reforms to drive investment. Tourism was booming. Locally we have had tremendous results with visitor expenditure. The support for our local tourism enterprises has intensified, with access to national parks, ecotourism expansion, money for the Mon Repos visitor centre revitalisation and more funding for important tourism events. Regional tourism organisations can attest to the support we provided to regional communities that rely heavily on tourism. We have the member for Currumbin to thank for that.

We in regional Queensland welcomed the many reforms in agriculture. Vegetation management in particular has given farmers more control over land management that boosts production. On-farm productivity and riparian recovery on affected farms as a result of ex-Tropical Cyclone Oswald were funded by the former LNP government. We all know that employment gives people the ability to pay their own way and provide for their families. The people of this great state should be able to depend on their elected representatives, but that does not mean we should be building a nation of dependants. The significant work that has been achieved already in the electorate on road infrastructure continues with major investments to ensure that we have the roads that we all need. After years of neglect my constituents are happy that our government finally showed respect to regional Queensland. I acknowledge the work and expectations of the Agriculture and Environment Committee. It is important that members of government, opposition and crossbenches work together to provide the legislative outcomes that are expected. I am very happy to be part of the parliamentary process. I look forward to working with my colleagues on the other side and the crossbenches to make sure that we get the desired results for Queensland. In conclusion, I wish to reaffirm my commitment and I will take every opportunity to advocate on behalf of the Burnett electorate.