




Speech By
Aaron Harper

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

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ADJOURNMENT

Townsville, Jobs

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (10.03 pm): I rise to speak about the way we started the year 2016 in Townsville—in the worst possible way. I know that the members for Mundingburra and Townsville would agree. On 15 January Queensland Nickel refinery announced the axing of 237 workers and subsequently went into voluntary administration. I would like to discuss the government's response to that news. The news of those job losses added to the burden of unemployment that Townsville has suffered in recent years. Those job losses followed losses at Aurizon, Telstra and Glencore, just to name a few.

I would like to clearly articulate the scene set at the Riverway centre in Thuringowa with the announcement, just days after the QNI job losses, of the rapid response team holding forums to discuss options available from a range of government services to assist the many in need. Nearly 200 people came to those first forums. I liken that scene to those of another crisis centre I had seen—in Innisfail in 2006, post Cyclone Larry. People walked in, some with young children on their hips, just looking for help and answers. I spoke with quite a few. They did not know where their next week's rent or mortgage payment might come from. Just days out from school starting, there were new books required and uniforms to buy. Some did not even know how they were going to put food on the table. There was little chatter in those forums—no banter or applause—as people just felt lost and disillusioned with the predicament they found themselves in. At the second forum just a few weeks ago the mood was somewhat more upbeat, with some sense of positivity from what the community had seen demonstrated by the accelerated capital works program.

I must commend the Department of State Development for its response and the outstanding work they have done to date, working collaboratively with DET, Centrelink, united care and other agencies to try to link people's skill sets to upcoming jobs as a result of the Premier's accelerated capital works program. Quite a few of those have been articulated today by the member for Townsville, so I will not repeat those. Well done, Premier.

Our government response tells only half the story. We have much more work to do. After last week's market led forum held in Townsville, led by Treasurer Curtis Pitt, I think we are well on our way to seeing the private sector develop more local job opportunities. I know of some exciting solar farm initiatives that I am right behind in Thuringowa that will create even more local jobs, and there appears to be a stronger desire than in recent years for private companies to invest in North Queensland.

While the member for Fairfax, Clive Palmer, sat recently in the federal parliament counting his cash, we were out there responding and doing our measured best to create more sustainable jobs in Townsville.