



Speech By  
**Aaron Harper**


**MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA**

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Record of Proceedings, 5 September 2017

**MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST**

**Townsville Stadium**

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (12.15 pm): On Friday, 18 August at 9 am a very special event occurred in Townsville. Townsville community members gathered together on the site of the North Queensland stadium. Officially, a vision of days past that our proud Labor government could, and indeed would, deliver a new stadium for the city of Townsville became a reality. This will be a stadium built for North Queensland by North Queenslanders. Thanks to local jobs being a priority for us and for Watpac, our Buy Local policy compliments this investment. People from across our local community, the state and the country came together to mark what was indeed a very special occasion—the sod turn of dirt where the home of the North Queensland stadium will sit and entertain thousands for many years to come.

Our great Premier, Annastacia Palaszczuk, must be commended for her vision in 2014 and for her commitment of \$140 million to deliver this massive \$250 million piece of public infrastructure, which has become jobs generating. Some 750 jobs have already been created. Unlike those on the other side, who cut, sack and sell, we create jobs. We have already seen investment from businesses. CQ University has invested in a \$40 million campus in the PDA. There has been the recent Sealink Queensland announcement of their MLP reaching stage 2. This will see another \$56 million invested in the area, with a new ferry terminal being constructed that will connect to the stadium site. The Hilton hotel group are wanting to invest in our priority development area. Today's *Townsville Bulletin* reports that Honeycombe has purchased the old Aurizon 19-hectare rail site—we will not have 'hectators' but plenty of spectators. There will be more construction in our PDA, more investment and more jobs. It will be a commercial mecca. Well done, Peter Honeycombe.

For the sod turning, Minister Anthony Lynham joined fellow state and federal MPs, Mayor Jenny Hill, councillors, Cowboy's CEO, Greg Tonner, former North Queensland Cowboys players Matty Bowen and Brent Tate and legend Kerry Boustead—who was a driving force behind the original stadium. Also present at the sod turning was ARL chairman, John Grant, Watpac CEO and multiple media representatives—including someone who should be commended; that is *Townsville Bulletin* editor, Ben English. Through our local newspaper he helped deliver the stadium by pushing for Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull—'Malcolm in the middle'; we do not know where he is at the moment—to join our Premier's and government's commitment to commit funding for the North Queensland stadium, home of the mighty North Queensland Cowboys. We texted each other after that event. He was correct when he said, 'This is a demonstration of what we can do when we all pull together.' History will show that indeed the federal government will come to the party, albeit at the eleventh hour—and 59 minutes—to commit funding through the nation's first ever city deal to help deliver the stadium.

The person who started the call needs to be thanked and acknowledged. That person is Cowboys' co-captain Johnathan Thurston. His call will never be forgotten. After the famous 2015 NRL grand final—who can forget it—which saw the Cowboys become premiership winners, he said,

'Townsville deserves a new stadium.' Thank you, JT. Who knows what will happen after the weekend? The Cowboys are back in the finals! Thank you, Bulldogs. I have never backed the Bulldogs in my life, but I did on Sunday.

Indigenous elders from the Wulgurukaba and Bindal people performed a special smoking ceremony before the sod turning. I believe that the Indigenous spirits of elders past will help lift our team spirits when they are playing or challenged on this special piece of land. Like the mighty All Blacks in New Zealand, especially in Dunedin, the home of Rugby champions, we will make this our home where other teams will fear to play as they face the greatness of the North Queensland fighting spirit, drenched in mateship.

It is indeed an endearing quality that we have in North Queensland, where we stand shoulder to shoulder to help a mate or neighbour when they are down. We see it in times of devastating natural disasters like Cyclone Larry, Yasi or Debbie and in industrial disasters like the QNI collapse. We stand together to overcome these challenges.

This stadium will become the home of future games. Of course, we have already called for, and hopefully we will get, a State of Origin match to be played in Townsville. I note the handing in of our homework by the LNP who also called for it but we had already asked for it. We also want more—like an NRL Indigenous All Stars game, concerts and many other events. Best of all will be a future NRL grand final when once again the North Queensland Cowboys will prevail. They will snatch victory from the jaws of defeat—at the last minute—to once again raise the NRL premiership trophy in Townsville, where the NRL grand final trophy will once again be held.