




Speech By
Ann Leahy

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (4.06 pm): It is my pleasure to rise and speak in the address-in-reply debate. Firstly, I pass on to His Excellency the Governor, Paul de Jersey, my best wishes and also, on behalf of this parliament, my apologies that it has taken some 10 months for us to get towards the completion of the address-in-reply. I hope His Excellency receives this before the end of his term, which we are hearing will be about the middle of next year.

I wish to thank the voters of the Warrego electorate for putting their faith in me to represent their interests and goals in the forthcoming term. I also extend a warm welcome to the new voters of my electorate, those whom Deputy Speaker Weir is quite familiar with—those in the east at Dalby out to Colkerri and Kamkillenbun and those in the west from the Quilpie shire all the way to the South Australian border.

As I stood in this House last term to make my maiden speech, I did so as the first woman ever elected to the state seat of Warrego since Federation. With the support of my constituents, I stand here today again making history as the first woman to ever be elected for two consecutive terms as the member for Warrego since Federation.

I extend my congratulations to Deb Frecklington on her election as the first female opposition leader in the state of Queensland. The opposition leader has a strong connection with my electorate of Warrego, having lived in both Roma and Meandarra. I believe that Deb and Jason have attended just a few Roma Cup races and the invitation is always open to them to attend this race meeting which is such a signature on the country racing calendar and the events of south-west Queensland.

There is no doubt that opposition leader Deb Frecklington has already encouraged many women to break the glass ceilings in politics. I only have to mention the outstanding female LNP candidates who put up their hands for the LNP Senate position following the retirement of Senator George Brandis. I congratulate Amanda Stoker on her election as the LNP senator for Queensland. I look forward to working with her on issues in my electorate and in my shadow portfolio of local government.

I also welcome Susan McDonald and Nicole Tobin to their positions on the forthcoming Senate ticket. I have known both of these courageous and caring women for many years, and I am delighted that they are on the LNP Senate ticket for the forthcoming federal election. I wish to thank Senator Barry O'Sullivan and Senator Ian Macdonald for their service to the Senate and for the work that they have done over many years for Queensland. I look forward to working with all of our new LNP Senate candidates on that ticket.

It is a privilege to serve as a shadow minister in Deb Frecklington's shadow cabinet. It is an honour to work alongside and with the local governments in Queensland—the councillors, mayors and their staff—on the long-term financial sustainability issues and integrity issues, and I do add emphasis to the integrity issues. Local government are the level of government who are closest to the community. On a day-to-day basis they feel the community sentiment and are well placed to support good positive community outcomes.

Every day we should not forget the more than 550 Queensland mayors and councillors who work tirelessly for their communities right across Queensland. Across the South Australian border from my electorate there are communities like Innamincka and William Creek. Those communities yearn for local government representation. They do not have local governments in that part of South Australia. Those locals will tell you about how lucky Queenslanders are to have such a good system of local government in Queensland.

While I am talking about local government, I wish to publicly thank the LGAQ for their kind donation of \$20,000 to the Queensland Drought Appeal. It was a most generous donation to help communities struggling from the impacts of prolonged drought in Queensland. While I am talking about drought—and it is absolutely unrelenting right across my electorate—I wish to thank those many organisations, such as Rotary and the QCWA, that are doing a lot of work to ensure that that assistance flows through. Cash is absolutely king when it comes to providing assistance for drought because that cash goes back through to the landholder, to the farmer, and back through our local small businesses that are also hurting during this drought.

I must also make mention of the 30 councils across Queensland that currently have water restrictions in their area. I do fear that if we do not have some rain some time soon then we will see more serious restrictions from those local governments and potentially, as we have seen in New South Wales, some of our communities may actually run out of drinking water. I think that is a very serious situation.

We meet many people in our electorates who fight for causes. The fight to bring back the Queensland bilby is a cause that zoologist and co-founder of the Save the Bilby Fund Peter McRae helped create and continues today. Peter McRae is truly a champion of the endangered bilby and he has inspired many to embrace this cause. Sadly, Peter McRae passed away on 7 September, the day before the 2018 Charleville 150 celebrations, where he was to be presented with a bilby made from spoons to acknowledge his dedication and 34 years of work as a scientist for the Queensland state government and the time that he had spent in south-west Queensland. I extend my condolences to Peter's partner, Tracy, his family and his many friends.

Peter McRae started working as a zoologist some 34 years ago, based at Charleville. He was compulsive about real-life observation. He studied the grasses, he studied the birds and he studied the bilbies. His search for information was endless. He was not a nine-to-five observer. He often spent the day observing and recording and then he would go out spotlighting at night for five or six hours only to repeat that day in, day out. It was during these spotlighting nights, when it can get mighty cold out in the desert, that Peter would arrange for a little cup of bourbon to arrive on the rooftop of the ute to warm the spotlight holder. I am assured that that happened on more than one occasion.

Peter was regarded by his colleagues as a great mentor. His job was to advise, but he shared his experiences and knowledge in a manner that appealed to the ranger who changed the toilet paper or the top brass of the department. I believe at one time it could have also been Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, but that story about the throne is probably for another day.

Peter established the first captive breeding facilities for bilbies in Queensland and designed, funded and built the Currawinya fence with teams of Conservation Volunteers. He released captive-bred bilbies in 2005 and spent months spotlighting and radio tracking them. The population of these bilbies slowly built up over five years to an exciting estimate of around 300 animals. That is probably one of the larger populations that we had of bilbies in Queensland or in Australia at any one time.

Unfortunately, the last couple of years have been devoted to the painstaking eradication of cats that breached the fence following the wet season of 2010-11. Peter also established the Charleville Botanical Reserve which showcases major vegetation types in the eastern mulga lands. Peter had two very distinct greeting sounds—'badding' and 'wooshaaa'—in south-west Queensland. We will remember him for these unique greeting sounds of 'badding' and 'wooshaaa'.

As a result of the state Labor government, my electorate has lost a vital Closing the Gap service in the state-of-the-art IDEAS van that was visiting Dalby, Charleville, Mitchell, Roma, Quilpie and Cunnamulla. Interestingly, the IDEAS van was taking more appointments in Charleville than in Mount Isa—and there is a population difference between those two communities—but not anymore thanks to the Palaszczuk Labor government. Had the LNP been elected to government, the IDEAS van would have had a commitment of \$3 million. It would be continuing to operate and prevent blindness in hundreds of people who will now have to travel thousands of kilometres for treatment. The simple fact is that people will go blind and diabetes will increase in regional areas because the state Labor government have refused to step up and help this service.

Due to the redistribution, the communities of Miles, Chinchilla and Jandowae have been moved from the electorate of Warrego into Callide, which is now well represented by the new member Colin Boyce. However, these communities are some of the luckiest in Queensland because when it comes to representation not only did they have an extremely dedicated and hardworking MP in Colin Boyce but also they have me going from one side of the electorate to the other on a very regular basis helping out, so they have the attention of two local MPs.

To the south, my electorate boundary is with the electorate of Southern Downs, which is now represented by the new member for Southern Downs, James Lister. James is a tireless worker for his electorate and, like him, I too share the frustrations that we experience with cross-border issues. I congratulate both my neighbouring new members for Callide and Southern Downs on their maiden speeches and all of the new members on this side of the House for their heartfelt maiden speeches. It was a pleasure to listen to the professional maiden speeches that embodied the members' life journeys, their families and their electorates.

Both Callide and Southern Downs share common issues with Warrego. I want to mention in particular the Chinchilla maternity services, which unfortunately have been on bypass and mothers and babies have been sent to the Dalby Hospital to birth. This is an appalling way to treat women and unborn children. It is not the first time that a state Labor government has neglected maternity services in regional areas or in Chinchilla for that matter. I distinctly recall the Chinchilla Hospital being on bypass prior to the state election in 2012. The matter was promptly addressed by the LNP as soon as we were elected to government. Now Labor is back in government what do we see? Chinchilla maternity services are back on bypass. This is appalling. When there is a state government that cares about birthing in the regions, these issues can be addressed just like the LNP did in Beaudesert and Cooktown. This is a dangerous situation for both mother and unborn child. It takes over an hour to drive from Chinchilla to Dalby when there are no roadworks, and I can tell you that it takes longer now given the amount of roadworks on that road.

There is another issue that is occurring at the Dalby Hospital. Staff unrest at the Dalby Hospital has reached boiling point as nurses are fearing for their personal safety every time they walk through the front doors. Steven Conn, who is a clinical nurse specialist at the hospital, said he risked losing his job for speaking out, but he was left with no choice. He said that nurses at the hospital lived with a very reasonable fear of personal harm on a shift-to-shift basis due to the alarming increase in mental health issues, gun ownership and the use of illicit drugs. We have had people with drug induced psychosis biting nurses and threatening all sorts of violence. The workplace health and safety policy is meant to be based on preventing reasonably foreseeable incidents. It is only a matter of time before a healthcare worker is seriously harmed at Dalby.

The nurses have approached the Darling Downs Hospital and Health Service on multiple occasions to ask for increased security measures. However, they have been disappointed because this has fallen on the deaf ears of the Palaszczuk Labor government. Their job is to deliver health care as nurses, not to be security guards. This government and Queensland Health need to address this issue and ensure that these nurses are able to feel safe in their workplace and safe with the patients that they are trying to care for. I will stand up for the nurses in Dalby in this House even if the members opposite will not.

An issue that impacts on everyone in my electorate is the ever-increasing cost of electricity and the ever-increasing cost that the Palaszczuk Labor government has not addressed in regional areas for businesses, households, pensioners or local governments. We know from the Hugh Grant report that was tabled in the House that 50 per cent of the bill is network costs and 47 per cent of that 50 per cent goes directly to the state Labor government. Put simply, it is taken as a tax.

I received a very passionate email from Emily and Rodney Geiger of the Eulo General Store. This is what Emily had to say—

I wanted to forward you this copy of our power bill which is from 23rd November 2017 to 23rd February 2018 with a total of \$8129.29. Given that this is the most quiet period for our shop, this bill is very difficult for me to pay. I made a point of finding our account for the same period last year. We used more power and paid less for it. As you can see I pay \$200 a week to try to reduce our bill, but this is not a drop in the ocean of \$8000.

Electricity prices are just another kick in the guts for small businesses in rural areas. We are struggling alongside our local graziers due to the ongoing drought as well as losing a number of people from our community to foreign property investment and property sales for carbon credits.

This is what the Labor government's electricity policies are doing to small businesses in south-west Queensland. As I move around my electorate, I find more and more Emily and Rodney Geigers—good people; young people having a go in small business only to be slammed with electricity which this Labor government is using as an unfair tax on pensioners, households and businesses right

across my electorate. We do not get the benefit of competition or concession deals on electricity that those in the south-east corner do. Those of us in regional Queensland just get to pay more tax. There is no doubt that the Palaszczuk Labor government has failed Emily and Rodney Geiger, and the Labor government has failed every electricity consumer in my electorate. I welcome Deb Frecklington's proposal to introduce competition into the regional electricity market. This is a stark contrast to the Labor Party's do-nothing approach.

The Warrego Highway Upgrade Program is progressing. That program was agreed to by the former LNP state government and the former coalition federal government. I want to make some comments in relation to the Dalby eastern and western access that is underway. Sadly, during that construction this year a child has lost his life and another has been seriously injured. I have also received reports of heavy vehicles hitting power poles due to the camber on the road which they have had to traverse because there is no side track.

Small businesses along the highway are really suffering from the loss of passer-by traffic. Parking has been disrupted, business takings are down and these businesses do not know how they will survive. A fruit and vegetable shop has reported to me that it has lost about a million dollars due to the roadworks. The customer count through the registers has decreased during the period of the roadworks by 17,000 transactions. Several of the full-time staff have left and not been replaced and the casual workers are getting very few shifts, so those roadworks have caused job losses in that business. This business has been seriously devalued because of the roadworks.

A butcher shop has reported to me losses of \$70,000. Just the other day I visited an industrial shed business which has lost its tenant due to changes in the access to their business, and that has cost them \$80,000 per year. I welcome the updated completion date of November. However, if we suddenly get wet weather this will not be met, and local jobs will continue to be lost and businesses which are really suffering now will continue to suffer further delays.

There are numerous other roads across my electorate, but unfortunately I do not think I will have time during the address-in-reply to talk about all of those. I do want to make mention of a unique situation that has been driven by the Thallon Progress Association. It has launched the Thallon silos stamp. It is a beautiful stamp and I encourage everyone to buy some of those stamps. It is not every day that a very small community like Thallon gets the opportunity to showcase its local scenery on a stamp for the whole world to appreciate. The most beautiful mural has been painted on the Thallon silos. It is an amazing work of art, and I encourage all members to visit Thallon and have a look at what this community has achieved. The progress association will have those stamps on display. I might even bring some down and share them with members here in the parliament. I am sure staff will see some of them on the correspondence that I send in due course. That is an amazing achievement for a small community like Thallon which consists of one pub and a wheat receival depot. It is absolutely incredible what they have done.

There are numerous other matters that I could talk about, but I want to quickly applaud the Augathella progress association for raising the safety of the intersection at Augathella. Both the Murweh shire and I have written to the department of main roads requesting an inspection of that intersection, because we believe there is potential at that intersection for there to be further accidents and we believe the government has a duty of care to make sure that that intersection is upgraded in due course.