




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR COOK

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PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Cook Electorate, Men's Shed

 **Ms LUI** (Cook—ALP) (2.09 pm): I rise today to speak of the Men's Shed as an important initiative that provides support for men in my electorate. This year I had the privilege of visiting two of the many Men's Sheds in the Cook electorate. In June I visited the Mareeba Men's Shed and was treated to a tour of the facility, which operates a second-hand shop, workstations, computer area, a tearoom and a courtyard for men to congregate.

The Mareeba Men's Shed recently expanded after gaining use of the old Mareeba courthouse. This facility would accommodate an administrator to manage the day-to-day operations, a computer area and a meeting space. Following the tour I stayed for morning tea and enjoyed great company over hot scones and a cup of tea. This was clearly a space that encourages positive interactions where men could chat and share personal experiences, form bonds and comradeship. The whole experience for me was very positive and I would like to thank the Mareeba Men's Shed for inviting me.

I want to shed some light on the social, emotional and mental health issues impacting men in our communities. Research shows that men are less healthy than women, drink more, take more risks and suffer more from issues surrounding isolation, loneliness and depression. I acknowledge that risks may be further exacerbated by other underlying factors such as relationship breakdown, loss of family and children through divorce or the loss of employment. It is concerning that males have shorter life expectancy, higher overall rates of hospitalisation and higher death rates than females. If they are of low socioeconomic status and/or Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, these risks are much higher than the general community.

In the Cook electorate my communities are regional and remote. I have the vast majority of discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and employment opportunities are limited due to lack of industries, thus contributing to the high rate of low socioeconomic status affecting communities. I acknowledge that while there are many Men's Sheds spread throughout the Cook electorate, their capacity to support vulnerable men may not be the same.

In August I visited the Lockhart River Aboriginal community and sat with two amazing men and listened to their experiences and recollection of community life. This experience differed from Mareeba Men's Shed, thus taking into consideration the cultural aspects, stigma around masculinity and overall challenges of remote living as underlying factors influencing positive engagement. We tried to unpack disengagement in relation to unemployment, drinking and poor health from a cultural perspective and at the same time acknowledge the important role we play as individuals to create the positive change we need. The experience for me not only highlighted the complexity in supporting men in regional and remote communities but also caused me to hear about the great work that is already happening to build strong men in our family, community and society.