




Speech By  
**Dale Last**

**MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN**

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**ADDRESS-IN-REPLY**

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (5.39 pm): I rise to provide my address-in-reply to the speech delivered by His Excellency in opening the 56th Parliament of Queensland. When I stood in this place and delivered my maiden speech during the last term of parliament, I did so with enormous pride, humility and an enthusiasm to make a difference in my electorate of the Burdekin. That pride I have as the member for Burdekin has not diminished. I am both humbled and privileged to represent the Burdekin electorate during the 56th Parliament, and I look forward to continuing the work I started during the previous term to ensure my constituents have access to the same support and services and the same opportunities as those available in metropolitan areas of the state.

I thank the Leader of the Opposition for her faith and trust in appointing me to the role of shadow minister for natural resources and mines and shadow minister for Northern Queensland, a role I believe is a perfect fit in my capacity as the member for Burdekin. I also want to thank a number of people who have assisted me during the campaign: Jim and Jewel Gist, Mark and Joan Stoneman, Ian Shields, Carl and Andrea Moller, Richard Hughes, Dave Nebauer, David Evans, Trevor Nicholson, Marlene Benn, Howard Simpson, Neville and Elvie Dickinson, former member for Burdekin, Rosemary Menkens, and her husband, Ray, and all the LNP members and volunteers who helped and supported me during the election campaign including working on the six pre-poll booths and assisting at the returning office.

It was a tough campaign with a newly expanded electorate, and the fact that I was returned for another term is testament to the hard work and the commitment to take up the fight on the issues that matter. Those issues revolve around jobs, cheaper power prices and insurance premiums, and the delivery of projects that will help drive economic prosperity in the region. I am passionate about equality and services, whether it be education, health, police or transport, and I will fight tooth and nail to ensure my constituents have the same opportunities and access to services as those available in metropolitan areas.

I want to acknowledge the team in my office, Julie and David, who embraced the electorate boundary changes and the increased workload with enthusiasm and a willingness to ensure fair representation across the electorate. The logistics of servicing an electorate the size of Burdekin became evident during the campaign. With an eight-hour drive from north to south and an average of 10,000 kilometres per month, my vehicle has truly become my second office.

I want to particularly acknowledge and thank my partner, Kim, and children, Jack and Molly, for their support and understanding. My regular absences have meant that Kim's workload has gone through the roof, and I have to say that at times I am in awe of her ability to cope with the demands of working, running a household, getting kids to school and performing the myriad other duties involved in looking after a house and five acres. I also want to acknowledge Rachel and John, who are down at the Sunshine Coast, for their ongoing support.

I have kicked some goals during the past three years, but there is more work to be done. I will elaborate in due course what I see as my priorities during this term of parliament. The 2017 electoral redistribution had one of the most profound impacts on the Burdekin electorate in its history. The electorate has virtually doubled in size and now stretches from just south of Townsville to south of Bowen and inland through the coalmining, grazing and cropping communities of Collinsville, Glenden, Nebo, Moranbah, Coppabella, Dysart, Middlemount and Clermont.

The Burdekin electorate is surely the most diverse electorate in Queensland. When we talk about what electorates contribute to this state, the Burdekin electorate has no equal. The largest sugarcane-growing area, one of the largest horticultural industries and the majority of coalmines in Queensland can be found within the electorate. It is a vast electorate with untapped potential—a land of opportunity with people whom I consider to be the salt of the earth. It is those opportunities that I want to talk about here today, because unless we take up those opportunities and turn them into reality they mean nothing.

Health, education, roads and transport, water and telecommunications are so important in regional and rural areas. We have to fight to attract teachers, nurses, doctors and allied health practitioners. When families are considering a move to these towns, this becomes vitally important. I am passionate about my schools, and I want to share with the parliament an initiative I started last term with regard to bullying in our schools. I have committed to delivering into all my schools two antibullying books titled *Have you Filled a Bucket Today?* and *Growing Up With a Bucket Full of Happiness*. These books are centred on the invisible bucket concept and have been enthusiastically embraced by all my schools with some wonderful feedback. I have also delivered buddy benches to every high school in my electorate. I want to acknowledge the Burdekin and Clermont men's sheds for building these benches and becoming involved in this important initiative.

It is absolutely imperative that our school students in rural and regional areas have the same opportunities, support and access to services as those enjoyed by their city cousins. A student being educated at Collinsville, Glenden or Dysart should not be disadvantaged because they live in these communities, and I am passionate about ensuring equality in education. I have some fantastic teachers and support staff in my schools, and I know that many of these staff go above and beyond their duties to ensure the best educational opportunities are provided to their students.

I am particularly concerned that the fabric of many resource communities is being torn apart due to the impact of mine rostering practices and FIFO workers. We have seen the demise of many sports, community organisations and businesses because of 12-hour shifts, and seven-on, seven-off rosters. This is even flowing through to schools where students are being pulled out of schools by parents for seven days to coincide with rostered days off, which, as members can appreciate, has a significant impact on school resources and the students themselves.

To give members some idea of the scope and extent of FIFO workers in my area, we spoke to Isaac Regional Council last week and on any given day it estimates up to 11,000 FIFO workers are in that council area working in the mines. That is a lot of extra staff coming in and out of my electorate on a daily basis. It is my goal to have some of those workers and their families move permanently to the electorate to help support those communities.

I have seven hospitals in my electorate which do a magnificent job, but once again I want to highlight the challenges faced by health boards in attracting and retaining staff at these centres. As an example, Collinsville Hospital has a single medical practitioner to service a community of almost 2,000 people. I know that the Mackay Hospital and Health Services team have been endeavouring to source a second doctor for over three years without success, which highlights the problems in the provision of health services to rural areas. It seems to be a constant battle, and the absence of a single doctor in some of my communities can have a major impact on the provision of medical services. What we take for granted in terms of accessing specialist treatment or medical imaging services is often a major logistical exercise for my residents, particularly the elderly.

I called my maiden speech 'Just Add Water' because I wanted to highlight the importance of water resources within the electorate and the potential that could be delivered with the delivery of critical water infrastructure. My enthusiasm for water development has not waned and, with projects like Urannah Dam, raising the wall of the Burdekin Walls Dam and the Elliott Main Channel, the future for agricultural and resource development could not be brighter. The delays in delivering these projects are a source of constant frustration and angst in my electorate. If there is one message I would like to give to the government today, it is simply this: make it happen. Of course this is tempered somewhat with the passing of the vegetation management legislation in May this year which has made agricultural development in this state, and particularly in my electorate, so much more difficult for our farmers.

I firmly believe that the Burdekin can become the food bowl of Australia and that the opportunities to grow and produce fruit and vegetables not only for domestic consumption but also overseas export is unlimited. We have the land, the infrastructure in terms of power supply and the roads, ports and labour. Our farmers are amongst the most innovative in the world, and it breaks my heart to see the brakes being put on them by a government which has no understanding of the importance of agriculture, particularly high-value agriculture, to the Queensland economy and no understanding of how the vegetation management laws will impact on this sector.

My support for the sugar industry is well known. During the last term of parliament our canefarmers, particularly those in the Wilmar Sugar Mill cane-growing areas, were under attack. The implementation of the sugar marketing legislation, giving our farmers choice in who markets their sugar, was a massive win for our farmers and a win for common sense and equality. Going forward, I want to be very clear that I will vigorously oppose any attempt to repeal sugar marketing legislation, and I certainly support the federal government in their moves to reinforce the code of conduct and carry that code of conduct forward. I am united with our canefarmers on sugar marketing, and I will continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with them on this important issue.

Of course I share their concerns with escalating power and water prices, which in some cases are crippling our farmers. When our farmers are reverting to diesel pumps around Queensland, you know something is seriously wrong. If power prices continue to rise at the levels they have in recent years, we will see a lot more farmers reverting to diesel powered pumps. I have already spoken in this place this week about unallocated water and the capacity in our dams and the fact that a lot of this water is not being utilised, particularly when we are in the middle of a drought.

During the previous term, I worked closely with my four local government authorities within the electorate—namely, the Townsville City Council, the Burdekin Shire Council, the Whitsunday Regional Council and the Isaac Regional Council—and a number of community organisations, chambers of commerce and industry groups to deliver better services and infrastructure for the electorate. It may come as a surprise to some members in this House that I still have unsealed roads within my electorate, like the Bowen Developmental Road between Collinsville and the Gregory Developmental Road, the Suttor Developmental Road, the Clermont Alpha Road and the Red Hill Road which runs past Goonyella mine. These roads are used to transport produce, resources and livestock from throughout the region to major centres, and it defies belief that my residents and businesses are still being forced to drive on these substandard roads which during the wet season regularly become impassable. We take sealed roads for granted in the south-east of the state, but when you consider the value of the produce that is transported over the roads in my electorate you have to question the equity in road funding.

Given the royalties flowing into the state coffers from the mines in my electorate, you would be forgiven for asking why we do not have the best roads and associated infrastructure in the state. You may well ask why we are still driving on unsealed roads over single-lane bridges and flood-prone causeways when the region contributes so much revenue to the state coffers. We do not want gold-plated roads. All we want is our fair share, and I think it is about time this Labor government started reinvesting some of these mining royalty funds into the communities and areas where the revenue comes from.

We live in an age of telecommunications technology, and simple things like making and receiving a call on a mobile phone that we take for granted in our metropolitan areas are simply not possible in vast areas of my electorate. When you combine that with intermittent or non-existent internet services, you begin to understand the impact this lack of service accessibility has on residents and businesses throughout the electorate.

Our youth are our future, and it concerns me that unemployment in rural and regional centres throughout the state is at record highs. If we are to attract and retain our youth, we need jobs and we need opportunities. Certainly, the resource sector is doing its share of providing jobs, but it needs to be more than that. We should never underestimate the importance of delivering a single service or a single project or supporting the start-up of a new business to rural communities. The addition of one or two families can have a massive impact on some of these small communities. It can mean the difference between a school staying open, the retention of teacher aides, the employment of nursing staff and the retention of police officers.

If there is a single project with the potential to deliver jobs and economic prosperity to the region, it is the Carmichael mine project. The Abbott Point coal-loading facility is in my electorate, along with the majority of the railway line infrastructure linking this port to the mine site. The potential for this project to deliver several thousand jobs to North Queensland is unparalleled, and I for one will not sit back and see this project sabotaged by green activists who have no idea what they are protesting about. These

protesters are not only disrupting businesses, like the Abbot Point coal-loading facility, they are damaging our international reputation. I certainly join my constituents in their condemnation of these activists and their repeated attempts to disrupt business in my electorate.

I have witnessed firsthand the demise of businesses in communities like Bowen and Collinsville who could no longer wait for this project to commence. I note the recent advice from Adani that they are moving ahead with the construction of the railway line and they are in the final stages of finalising approvals which will enable this project to commence. We need the project to start sooner rather than later, and we certainly need the jobs in North Queensland.

There are a number of projects on the horizon for the Burdekin electorate with the potential to deliver significant numbers of jobs and economic prosperity to my communities—projects like the development of industrial land at Ayr, the Haughton River Bridge replacement project, the construction of a food-processing facility at Bowen, the construction of Urannah Dam, the construction of DV shelters at Bowen and Ayr, the redevelopment of the basketball stadium at Ayr, the construction of the Drive It NQ facility at Calcium, the construction of an all-tide facility at Molongle Creek, the sealing of the May Downs and Pasha roads in the Isaac area, the replacement of the Phillips Creek Bridge at Moranbah, and the construction of multipurpose halls at Clermont and Collinsville state high schools.

I will come back to where I started. The Burdekin electorate has unlimited opportunities—opportunities that will make a real difference to my constituents, opportunities that will translate to jobs and economic prosperity. However, those opportunities will mean nothing unless we have a commitment to deliver them. I am up for the fight and I look forward to working with all the residents, businesses and organisations in my electorate during this term to make it a better place to live, work and play.