




Speech By  
**Julianne Gilbert**

**MEMBER FOR MACKAY**

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**ADDRESS-IN-REPLY**

 **Mrs GILBERT** (Mackay—ALP) (6.11 pm): I would like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which this parliament meets and recognise the traditional owners of the land of the Mackay electorate, the Yuwi people, in particular the Yuwibura group. Mr Speaker, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment as Speaker.

I am very honoured to be elected for a second term as the member for Mackay. I am also honoured to be the first woman to be elected to the seat of Mackay. My electorate is very progressive and inclusive. The expanded Mackay electorate now takes in all of Mount Pleasant and Glenella. Mackay is such a beautiful place to live, work and play. It is no wonder, therefore, that the Mackay region's economy is up there with those regions leading Queensland's economic recovery after the mess we were left in after winning the 2015 election.

Life is bright for Queenslanders under a Labor Palaszczuk government. Since the 55th Parliament we have seen unemployment come down, new industries in the region on the rise, infrastructure builds underway or nearly completed, diversification of agriculture, development of the biofutures industry and a developing entrepreneurial and innovation community—and all this is being driven by the Palaszczuk government.

Our government's training packages for the long-term unemployed are having a visible positive effect in my community. The Palaszczuk government is a progressive government putting the building blocks in place for a bright future for my region. Everyone loves having a job. That is why it is exciting to see so many people in my region return to work. The Mackay region has the lowest unemployment rate in Queensland. At the moment it is 3.2 per cent. There is still more work to be done, especially for our youth. Reinstating Skilling Queenslanders for Work has given the long-term unemployed in my electorate the opportunity to gain skills and qualifications and get back into the rhythm of regular work. There are many great news stories from this program. The work placements and certificates gained are varied, with the long-term unemployed gaining fully accredited skills.

I will share some of the good news stories with the House. Canegrowers participants gained licences for heavy vehicles for on-farm—skills also transferrable to the mining sector—through the harvest haul-out program. Ideal Placements graduates gained certificates in aged care, administration, business and hospitality. Energy Skills Queensland graduates gained skills needed for careers in the railway. These are just some of these positive programs.

The Mackay showgrounds have been transformed over several rounds of Skilling Queenslanders for Work by participants who have constructed gardens, pathways, artwork and assisted in the construction of a new grandstand, equestrian centre and seating. Participants graduate with a certificate in construction.

Because of the quality of the programs, the majority of graduates have found stable full-time work. I was at the Mackay showgrounds just the other day and Steve Gavilli pointed out the businesses surrounding the grounds where their graduates have secured permanent work. They are all doing well. The best outcome for my region is having graduation ceremonies cancelled because the graduates cannot get time off work to attend.

Skilling Queenslanders for Work has been an opportunity for some participants to develop their skills beyond the program. Ian McNaulty, for example, when working on the Mackay showgrounds redevelopment was spotted by Woollam Constructions, which was supervising the project, and was offered a carpentry apprenticeship. This program has changed the outlook of Ian's life and that of his young family's future. To change the cycle of unemployment, children need to see their parents heading off to work as part of a normal way of life. Skilling Queenslanders for Work has given this opportunity to many families like Ian's.

Apprenticeships are on the rise in my region, although we are still seeing a skills shortage. Hastings Deering have increased their intake across Central Queensland. Ergon have continued strong numbers and BMA's intake has increased to 41 this year. Our small contractors are also doing a lot of heavy lifting engaging in training and apprenticeships. The intake of apprentices is a mix of school leavers and mature age people reskilling. It is also good to see a mix of gender and cultures. The brightest and the best are being selected.

The Palaszczuk government's incentives through payroll tax exemptions and discounts to WorkCover payments for employers to take on apprentices are showing strong results. Businesses have expressed that they need more support to get enough skilled workers trained to take up vacancies in the trades sector servicing the mining industry.

The Minister for Training and Skills Development, Shannon Fentiman, hosted the first of a series of round tables to ensure regional views will shape the government's policies and activities so apprenticeships and traineeships continue to deliver the skilled workforce businesses and communities need. She heard firsthand from Mackay residents about their successes and barriers, and their experience of taking a worker from starting a training contract through to earning their qualification. While in Mackay she also announced the \$1 million Advancing Apprentices Fund, which will partner with industry groups and businesses to produce promotional campaigns to highlight the successes that apprenticeships and traineeships are producing and encourage more people and businesses to get involved.

The Palaszczuk government has a good mix of funding for training, incentives for employers and information for all stakeholders available, along with strong support from industry groups and businesses. There are about 1,600 vacancies for skilled workers in my region. If there is anyone with any spare tradies out there, please send them to Mackay. We desperately need them.

Another program to be embraced by employers was the Back to Work program and the Youth Boost payments. These programs have given employers the confidence to take on more employees. When the green shoots started showing in the economy, businesses started to employ youth and long-term unemployed people. Business owners told me that they would not have taken on additional employees without the payments. The economy was too uncertain.

Uneek Industries and Mackay Screen Repairs are just two of the varied types of businesses employing and training staff through this program. Mackay Screen Repairs, with three new employees, could spend funds on additional equipment and work stations. Uneek Industries are a group of cafes, and they could spend time on delivering professional development and skills in hospitality. Both businesses are adding to the skill sets of the community.

I have been told by contractors that the only thing that kept the financial wolves from the door was the Palaszczuk government's maintenance and upgrades of schools and other public buildings. In my region, the construction industry struggled when the commodity prices dropped. The former LNP government had no projects in the pipeline to support the regions or contractors in my region. Some of Labor's school infrastructure included the brand-new purpose built classrooms at Mackay special school which is supporting students to reach their academic and personal potential. The new facilities also assist teachers and support staff with modern equipment that meets the unique needs of their students.

Students at Mackay State High School have refurbished state-of-the-art home economics facilities fitted out with professional standard, hospitality equipped kitchens and modern manual arts classrooms. The school is also able to offer sports excellence programs with a brand-new gym. Local contractors were engaged to carry out the construction work. It was fantastic to visit the works and to meet young local apprentices working on the job. There have been so many upgrades and I will share

one more—the air conditioning at Mackay North State High School. The students in the north need good-functioning air conditioning to enhance learning. The north is too humid for schools not to have it working. Victoria Park State School—

**Mr Whiting:** Hear, hear!

**Mrs GILBERT:** Yes, a former student. Victoria Park State School had their aged swimming facilities rebuilt and the teaching facilities upgraded. They were nearly 50 years old. Mackay West State School have refurbished teaching areas. These are more locals on the job at all of these schools. Slade Point State School and Mackay North State High School are excitedly waiting for their new fences, and the list goes on. All students and teachers deserve to be learning and teaching in modern, well-maintained spaces.

The new Mackay Fire Station was officially opened by the Premier and Minister Crawford earlier during Governing from the Regions in Mackay. The \$7.5 million project has seen fire and emergency services workers moving from the old, cramped site to this modern facility, where equipment can be stowed appropriately, training can be undertaken and, for the first time, there is space for them to be able to appropriately maintain the fire units. The new facility has modern communication equipment, which is essential in any emergency. The men and women working in emergency services deserve to have quality facilities. The contractor awarded to build this wonderful facility was Woollam Constructions, using local workers and local contractors—painters, plumbers, concreters, block layers. About 130 workers worked on this project. This meant 130 families in work.

Improvements and upgrades to health services continue under the Palaszczuk government. The Mackay Step Up Step Down facility construction has begun in Shakespeare Street and is due to be completed early next year. The facility will allow for patients to move safely from acute care and back into society with support. The facility will be staffed with trained mental health staff and also have rooms for consultations and rooms for visitors, all in a home-like atmosphere. The aim of this government is to support those with mental health issues so that they can participate in society.

Queensland's procurement strategy, Buy Queensland, has ensured that local contracts have been awarded to local contractors. TMR and the Department of State Development ran seminars and coached contractors to be procurement ready when the \$500 million Mackay Ring Road came online. This infrastructure project is the largest seen in the Mackay region. It is fantastic to visit the construction site and see vehicles with local logos. Without the foresight of the Palaszczuk government, work may have been awarded out of the region and our regional companies would have missed out on this valuable work.

This is not the only major piece of road construction that has been delivered or planned to start with a mix of state and federal funding. The Peak Downs Highway four wooden bridges replacement project has been completed. The \$80 million northern access upgrade is still to be started, as is the long-awaited Walkerston Bypass, which will continue on from the ring road project. I am pleased to announce that the \$28 million Vines Creek Bridges project, which I have reported on in the House several times, was fully funded under the Labor Palaszczuk government and will be finished in October, months ahead of schedule. There have been many improvements to the Bruce Highway with additional overtaking lanes to make it safer.

This commitment to road infrastructure improves the pit to port, farm to port and business to port supply chain. This modern transport supply chain is giving industry the confidence to expand. Businesses will expand and support services for the mining sector are on the rise. As I said, we need more skilled workers. The Palaszczuk government has committed \$3 million for the mining centre of excellence. Workers across Queensland needing to get their mining tickets to work on a mine site will be able to train in this state-of-the-art facility. The design process is well and truly underway. With the combination of the Resource Industry Network and the Mackay Regional Council, we will soon see work starting.

Regional Queensland, and in particular my region, is geared up and ready for the biofutures industries. Mercurius, a US company in partnership with QUT, is developing the technology for producing aviation fuel, marine diesel and biodiesel from the waste after sugarcane milling. Bagasse and other plant waste products can be used. A pilot plant will be situated in Mackay with five processing plants built across Queensland. Bio Processing Australia, a New South Wales company, have been enticed into Queensland via a state government grant. They are looking at using crop waste to build bioproducts. Companies like these are attracted to Mackay and the wider region because of our agriculture feedstock, cogeneration electricity produced at our mills, land availability and water supply. Developing new industries is important for regional Queensland to take the reliance and fluctuation out of the coal and sugar prices in our economy.

I would like to thank some of the people who helped me get here. I would like to thank my office staff, Suzanne and Jane, for their unwavering support for me and the Mackay constituents and constituents from the surrounding regions. Election campaigns cannot be won without hardworking campaign teams and branch members. I thank all the volunteers in my team. I am so blessed to have a large and supportive family who are always there to get the campaign underway and organised.

I say thank you to my parents, Bev and Jim; my three sisters, Michele, Susan and Caroline; their husbands, Jeff and Jason; and my two brothers, James and Anthony; their wives, Leesa and Ophellia; and my numerous nieces and nephews—do not worry; I am not going to name all of those—my daughter, Catherine; my son-in-law, Ian; and my grandchildren, Kia, Keione and Sienna. I also say a big thankyou to my stepsons, David and Edward.

I would like to thank my former colleagues from the Queensland Teachers' Union—Graham Maloney, Kevin Bates, Sam, Brendan, Kate, Thalia and Mark. I say a special thankyou to Barry Thompson, who came out of retirement, and all of the wonderful teachers in Mackay. I thank them for their many collective hours of work after school, on weekends and working on booths on election day.

I would also like to thank the AFULE—Mick McKitrick, Muddy Waters, Phil Brown and all the members from across the regions. Their members have done it tough over recent years, so I say thank you for giving me support. I would also like to thank the NUW for their support. A big thankyou needs to go to the support staff from the ALP office, especially to Lucy Collier. She is a real champion.

I would like to also thank my campaign manager, my husband, Frank. I say thank you for his consistent support and guidance and thank you for travelling on this journey with me—thank you, thank you.