




Speech By
Cynthia Lui

MEMBER FOR COOK

Record of Proceedings, 26 February 2019

MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Cook Electorate Office

 **Ms LUI** (Cook—ALP) (2.11 pm): I hope I can take the temperature down a bit with my speech today, so here goes. Today I rise to place on the record my decision to relocate the Cook electorate office from Mareeba to Cairns. In December 2018, I publicly announced my intention to relocate the Cook electorate office from Mareeba to Cairns. It was not a decision that I made lightly. I based my decision on fairness and equity for the Cook electorate as a whole.

I came into office in late 2017 and I had 12 months to get a feel for the job, working across a vast and diverse electorate. I can proudly say that I have made every effort to visit communities in the Cook electorate, because I feel strongly about having good representation. Through my work across the electorate, I make it my No. 1 priority to promote my office space to encourage positive engagement with my constituents. I have talked and listened to constituents in communities throughout the electorate, to get a better insight into what communities are saying. I can tell the House that constituents want reassurance regarding good representation, because the one issue that keeps coming up, time and time again, is the ability to readily access the office of their local member of parliament.

I acknowledge the view that Cairns is not in the Cook electorate. However, it is the most central location for the large number of constituents who live in the Cook electorate. To put this into perspective, the Cook electorate covers almost 290,000 square kilometres of Far North Queensland. The Cook electorate consists of 14 local governments, including 27 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, one town authority and three small townships. It is unrealistic, to say the least, that I will hold a regular mobile office in every single community. The best way to cover the vast area is from Cairns, which is the transport hub for Far North Queensland.

I encourage my constituents to actively engage with me regarding issues that are important to them. To be inaccessible to my constituents is not something that I can be proud of. Take a mother from Saibai Island in the Torres Strait who is travelling through Cairns to take a child to boarding school and is looking for an opportunity to access the office of the local member. Take an elderly client from Cape York who is in Cairns for specialist care. My point is that my constituents need to know that they will be listened to and that they can access me or my electorate staff. A Cairns office means that I can meet with more locals more often.

My decision is based on what is fair for the whole electorate, taking into consideration the barriers that restrict people's ability to access my office in Mareeba, including the social, economic, disability and transport factors that are involved. I have made every effort to invite constituents to meet me in Mareeba. I can tell the House that only one person has kindly offered to do so as a matter of convenience, being a resident of Atherton who works in Cairns. To make myself accessible, on many occasions I have made allowances to meet constituents in Cairns. I would like to say a huge thankyou to the member for Cairns for being an absolute champion by offering his conference room for my regular meetings.

Initially, I would travel to different venues to see constituents, until I realised that I was wasting valuable time travelling between meetings. My office would try to schedule appointments in Cairns on the same day, but this turned out to be a huge challenge. In particular, people flying into Cairns who were looking for opportunistic meetings that, unfortunately, could never occur, were disadvantaged.

My decision to relocate the office is based on fairness and equality. I am in this position for a reason and I have a responsibility to all the communities and all the people of Cook. There is no right or wrong answer in this situation, but I am doing what I feel is in the best interests of my communities, including Mareeba. I am committed to the future aspirations of the Cook electorate and I will honour that by being a representative who serves everyone, no matter where in the electorate they live.