




Speech By
Scott Stewart

MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

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MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Queensland Country Bank Stadium

 **Mr STEWART** (Townsville—ALP) (1.18 pm): I quote the Premier's words in Friday's *Townsville Bulletin*—

No one who saw that 2015 grand final will ever forget it.

I just remember the smiles. Two Queensland teams at their absolute best—millions glued to their TVs ... an absolute thriller of a game.

All that came flooding back at the Open Day a few weeks ago. I saw mums and dads and children trying on the seats imagining what Game Day would be like.

I overheard workers proudly showing it to their families.

"I built that," they said. Their kids beamed with pride. We build good football stadiums in Queensland. Best in the world.

I met Ray on Level 5 Sky Deck of the stadium two weeks out from opening. Ray was about six foot six in the old measure and was about two pickaxe handles across in his shoulders. He told me how proud he was to be part of building that magnificent stadium. He also showed me his seat for every Cowboy game—those that will go ahead—because his kids had given him a season ticket in the new stadium as a Christmas present.

Mr Deputy Speaker, 28-21 was the final score in the Cowboys v Broncos game on Friday at the new Queensland Country Bank Stadium in Townsville. While the game did not go to script—where the Cowboys were to beat the Broncos in extra time—we did celebrate the new stadium with Johnathan Thurston kicking the first goal just before the teams ran onto the field. While the Cowboys did not win the game on Friday night—and I have a few wagers I need to square up on that matter—it was played in front of 25,000 people. It was a full house. Every accommodation room was booked out, with visitors flooding into the city to watch the game.

At the Cowboys' club, hundreds of families and loyal families were gathered ready for the stampede as supporters dressed in Cowboys gear all walked together across Victoria Bridge and to the stadium some 600 metres away. As the stampede entered the stadium, they were met by the bronze life-size statue of Johnathan Thurston. The statue of JT was sculptured by local artist Jane Hawkins and immortalises Thurston kicking the winning field goal that sealed the 2015 NRL premiership for the North Queensland Cowboys against the Broncos. It was JT who asked the Prime Minister at that time to help build a new stadium because Townsville deserved one.

'Johnathan Thurston is a great Queenslander and a great Australian who has done so much to support the local communities in Townsville and North Queensland—in fact, right across our state and Australia,' the Premier said at the unveiling. She went on to say, 'He is best known for his amazing feats on the field. However, JT does an incredible amount of work off the field too.'

I walked down Flinders Street on Friday night with my family and friends just a few hours before kick-off time. Every bar, restaurant, pub and cafe was filled with people. City Lane, which has several bars, reminded me of Caxton Street at Origin time. People were meeting friends, having a few drinks, talking about footy. That is exactly why we built the stadium in the CBD. The vision was to activate the city around those events and to bring people back to the CBD as a hub of entertainment.

The *Townsville Bulletin* ran story after story after story on Saturday and then again on Monday of business owners talking of the success of the night and how well they were supported with people both before and after the game. Matt Merrin, owner of Jam Corner, said, 'We now have a \$250 million magnet bringing stimulus back into the city. We have not seen a hive of activity in the city for such a long time. Confidence is returning to the CBD, with new construction and redevelopment of buildings in the city in addition to an increased number of people wanting to live close to or actually in the CBD.'

On the evening of the Elton John concert, preconcert the restaurants and bars were alive. With 20,000 people walking into the stadium, you could feel the energy. Everyone had huge smiles on their faces. Post-concert the city streets were full again. The Queensland Country Bank Stadium was built by locals for locals to a world-class standard, achieving the vision for the stadium.

With the remaining seconds I thank all of those from Watpac who did an outstanding job delivering that stadium project—2,200 people were employed to do that particular job and, of that, 83 per cent were locals. That stadium was built by locals for locals and, as we have said, to a world-class standard. We saw a world-class game played on Friday night. It was not quite the outcome we were looking for in the north, but still it was a world-class game for world-class people.