




Speech By
Barry O'Rourke

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

Record of Proceedings, 13 May 2021

MOTION

Revocation of Protected Areas

 **Mr O'ROURKE** (Rockhampton—ALP) (5.29 pm): I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today and pay my respect to elders past, present and emerging. I would also like to pass on my congratulations to the Speaker on his appointment to the high position in this parliament for a consecutive term. He is the first to achieve this in many years. I thank him for his ongoing support of Queensland.

I am deeply honoured and humbled to again be given the opportunity to represent the wonderful people of Rockhampton. Anyone who knows me knows how much I love Rocky and the people who make it a wonderful place. I really look forward to continuing to work hard for our community, so I thank the people of Rockhampton for the faith they have in returning me as their local member.

I would not be here today without the dedicated commitment and support of many. To my family, I thank you. I am so lucky to have a family who has supported me over the years and for their patience. I thank my wife, Sue-Ann; my sons, James and Harry, and their partners, Kelsey and Hannah; my brothers and sisters; and my extended family and friends. Without you I would not be able to do the job that I do. You have moulded me into the person I am today.

Thank you to my campaign manager, Craig Marshall, and the many Labor Party members who have supported me and worked tirelessly during the campaign. I have to thank Amanda, Craig's wife, for allowing him the time to support me. Thank you to the people of Rockhampton who placed my signs on their fences and to those who did the hard yards.

I particularly wanted to mention a few. Tom and Marree Bartlem, you are legends. To Ann, Karen, Deb, Evan, the two Barrys, Margaret, Rhonda, Robert, Graham, Sandra, Denise, Jim and Dan: thank you. To my brothers, Brian and Tony and his wife, Lyndall, thank you. You have given freely of your time, offered great advice and been a great sounding-board. To all my booth volunteers, thank you to all.

I congratulate Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk on her re-election for a third term. She is now the longest serving female Queensland premier. The Premier has led our party with dignity and has guided us through COVID with a calm and measured approach. She has listened to the health advice and acted to protect the people of Queensland. This has also allowed us to get on with delivering our COVID financial recovery plan. With the Premier's strong leadership, we will continue to make a difference for those in our community who need a hand.

Under her leadership we have been creating jobs, building important infrastructure, introducing important social justice reforms, growing the economy and restoring our vital frontline services. We have seen over 320,000 jobs created in Queensland since the Palaszczuk government was elected, and Rockhampton is one of those places that has benefited.

While some businesses have been doing it tough in Rocky, I have also heard many saying that they have not seen business as good. Just recently I was looking at the job vacancies in Rockhampton and the Capricorn Coast on seek.com and there were 212 job vacancies advertised. The real estate market is going well, with sales as good as or better than in the early 2000s. There is a positive feeling in town and many are looking forward to a prosperous future.

Some of the infrastructure projects that have happened or are happening in Rockhampton have created hundreds of jobs. Road construction projects such as the \$1.065 billion to build the Rockhampton Ring Road, which is due to commence construction next year; \$158 million for the Rockhampton northern access upgrade to duplicate the Bruce Highway to four lanes through Parkhurst; \$75 million for the duplication of the Capricorn Highway between Rockhampton and Gracemere; and the many other road projects are supporting more than 1,290 jobs in Central Queensland as part of Queensland's plan for economic recovery. Another major project nearing completion is the Capricornia Correctional Centre—a \$241 million expansion, creating a further 232 permanent jobs.

Rockhampton is going well and we have a long list of job-creating projects to be delivered over the next four years. While it has been good for Rocky, we have seen a real tightening of the rental market. Those on low incomes are finding it very difficult to pay the rent or to even find a rental property. The federal government has always played an important role in supporting public housing. Unfortunately, the LNP under Tony Abbott completely wiped the National Rental Affordability Scheme that played a significant role in increasing our housing stock—and we are paying the price for that today. The federal government needs to restore that program and start increasing our public housing supply. This is not just about addressing homelessness; it is also about helping our small businesses. If workers cannot find affordable housing in Rocky, employers will struggle to find staff, and that hurts our entire local economy.

The Queensland government is doing its bit with a \$1.6 billion building program across Queensland, with approximately 60 new dwellings for Central Queensland. I must acknowledge all of the community organisations out there that do an absolutely wonderful job in supporting members of our community, particularly at the moment while we are under housing stress. They do an absolutely wonderful job working with those people.

Some of the projects that have been delivered over the last three years through the Works for Queensland funding to the Rockhampton Regional Council include the development of the artificial hockey surface and other infrastructure at the Rockhampton Hockey grounds. That is a \$2.4 million project of an excellent standard. The Cedric Archer Park water play area at Gracemere is a \$1.3 million project that has seen the area become a recreational hub embraced by the Gracemere community, and recently we opened a \$600,000 pump track.

Other projects include the Gracemere CBD footpath upgrades—\$500,000—and the reception room at the Rockhampton City Hall where they removed the mezzanine floor and restored the hall to its former glory to allow for civic functions to be conducted. That was a \$1.3 million project. There were SES facilities upgrades with the construction of additional buildings and amenities at the Gracemere SES site. That was a \$1.1 million project.

Work happening at the present time is the Rockhampton Airport upgrade—a \$6.4 million project—which has seen our regional airport completely revamped. It is probably going to be one of the best in regional Queensland. In recent weeks we have seen \$9.46 million go to the council in the last round of Works for Queensland. The new art gallery is taking shape and due for completion midyear—an investment of \$15 million by our government.

In relation to Rookwood Weir, the roadworks have been completed, Riversleigh Bridge was officially opened last week, the workers' accommodation is finished and work has commenced on the weir itself. This is a total combined spend of \$367 million to support the construction of the 86,000-megalitre Rookwood Weir on the Fitzroy. The federal member for Capricornia had to be dragged kicking and screaming to this project to get the funding. She kept referring to this as 'just a big bathtub'—86,000 megalitres is an awfully big bathtub.

During the last term of government, in education we had a \$2.75 million upgrade to the home economics block at North Rockhampton State High School; an additional \$1.6 million to enclose an area with two multipurpose courts also at North Rockhampton State High School; and a \$1.2 million upgrade of the Rockhampton State High School for air conditioning. We saw the completion of the \$12 million upgrade and repair work at the Rockhampton Courthouse. There was the \$30 million total spend to complete improvements to intersections and road train access on Rockhampton-Emu Park Road to access the beef facilities.

I suppose now is a good time to mention Beef Week—a \$1 million investment by the Palaszczuk government. It was pretty good there last week. We had so many of our ministers—the Premier, the Deputy Premier, the Treasurer and the farmers' friend, Minister Furner—and parliamentary colleagues there showing support for our beef industry. There were very few, if any, LNP members there to support them.

The \$25.5 million Rockhampton Hospital car park was delivered. It is a four-storey building with 594 car parks. The \$14 million drug rehabilitation centre is under construction and expected to be finished later in the year. The Rockhampton Regional Council received \$500,000 for an upgrade to netball facilities at Jardine Park under the female facilities program. The investment in Rockhampton and Central Queensland has been significant and there are many more projects on the go.

Just a few of my election commitments include: \$25 million to deliver stage 1 of the redevelopment of Browne Park, which will be a wonderful asset for our local community; \$10.7 million to establish a new substation at Gracemere to improve network performance and support the growing community; \$8.4 million total spend for a business case for a Rockhampton campus consolidation and a new Central Queensland TAFE Centre of Excellence; \$300,000 to provide equitable access to the amenities and B block at Crescent Lagoon State School; \$900,000 to install the A block lift at Crescent Lagoon State School; \$100,000 for a hard roof shade cover to the existing prep play area at Crescent Lagoon State School; \$190,000 for a covered STEM amphitheatre at Glenmore State High School; \$920,000 allocated across 16 schools in the Rockhampton electorate for maintenance throughout the 2020-21 financial year; \$360,000 allocated across 16 schools in the Rockhampton electorate for minor works in schools throughout the 2020-21 financial year; \$409,000 to provide equitable access to the hall stage at North Rockhampton State High School; \$250,000 to replace the septic system at Port Curtis Road State School; \$370,000 for a quadrangle upgrade at Rockhampton North Special School; \$700,000 for a security fence at Rockhampton State High School; \$600,000 for a security fence at Gracemere State Primary School; \$18.2 million to deliver a cardiac hybrid theatre to establish diagnostic and interventional cardiac services to support a wide range of cardiovascular procedures; \$7 million to continue the upgrade of the Rockhampton Ambulance Station and Operations Centre; and \$6 million to refurbish the Rockhampton Hospital mental health ward and delivery of a six-bed expansion.

We will see more mobile Police Beat vans, additional QLiTE devices, more body worn cameras and approximately 150 additional police across the district. Fire and Emergency Services will receive \$2.2 million for the construction of a new auxiliary fire and rescue station at Gracemere. There is a \$301,000 commitment to the CQU Rockhampton Panthers Australian Football Club and \$35 million to widen Lawrie Street in Gracemere to four lanes and upgrade the intersections.

I am proud to be the member for Rockhampton and proud of what has been delivered by successive Labor governments. There are so many more projects, but suffice it to say that, from hospital hill to the top of Mount Archer, more than a billion dollars has been spent. I intend to keep the tradition going. There is still more to be achieved, and I again thank the people of the Rockhampton electorate for their support. I will continue to provide a strong voice for our region.