




Speech By
Cynthia Lui

MEMBER FOR COOK

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Ms LUI** (Cook—ALP) (12.08 pm): It is an honour and privilege to stand here for a second term as the member for Cook in the 57th Parliament. I start by acknowledging the traditional owners of this land, the Jagera and Turrbal people, whose land we share and I pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. I honour nguzu muruygul, my ancestors, and nguzu buway, my Torres Strait Island heritage, as I embark on this important journey as a Torres Strait Islander member of parliament.

Walking into this place for the first time was daunting. I felt like I was living in two very separate worlds—as someone from a remote, culturally oriented community and as a politician. I come from a world where remoteness shapes every conversation for people's lived experience. It creates a vortex that only filters challenges and issues, where your postcode determines your social and economic status, placing people from these parts in the most marginalised and disadvantaged groups in this state. Then there is this world, a very privileged world where we make all the big decisions and where opportunities are created to influence change in society. Back then I was so afraid of losing myself to what was in front of me and where this new path would take me personally, so I did all I could do to keep Brisbane away from Yam Island. Of course, it all changed in 2018, when I was given the wonderful opportunity to take our Premier, Hon. Anastacia Palaszczuk, to my home of Yam Island. It was on this day that my worlds collided. It was on that day that I realised I could be that person from a very disadvantaged background to be a politician in state parliament.

I know that there will be many others like me to come. It was a long time coming for Queensland to see their first Torres Strait Islander politician walk into parliament. I want to see many more First Nations people come after me. I want to see others from remote communities break the barrier that remoteness puts upon us and that limits the opportunities that may seem so far out of our reach. No opportunities are out of reach. It takes one to walk towards those opportunities, know that it is okay to be a little different, trust your journey and use your lived experience as a driving force to create change—and never forget where you come from.

I am humbled to be back for a second term to represent the people and communities of the electorate of Cook in Far North Queensland. I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate our Premier, Hon. Anastacia Palaszczuk, for a very convincing win in the 2020 state election. She is the only female premier in this country to be elected to parliament three terms in a row.

I would also like to congratulate every member of this House as we embark on this term to advocate for the betterment of all of our communities. I want to especially acknowledge and congratulate every member of the Labor caucus. It is an absolute pleasure to serve with all of you in a very diverse and progressive team. This government continues to break ground and lead the way in a progressive movement to create positive change for all Queenslanders today and for generations to come.

It is an absolute honour to be one of 21 outstanding female MPs in the Palaszczuk government and one of three First Nations parliamentarians to be elected at the same time. I would like to acknowledge my First Nations sister, Minister Leeanne Enoch, and Lance McCallum, member for Bundamba, as we embark on this shared journey to elevate First Nations issues in Queensland.

In my very first speech in the 56th Parliament I held a traditional island mat to signify its use in Torres Strait island culture. I used this mat in my first speech to show my commitment to the people of Cook that, no matter what the context, I would embrace the significance of what the mat represents, as a place to sit down and create an open dialogue around various issues.

Cook is the only electorate that consists of a large number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait island discrete remote communities, the only electorate in Australia that shares an international border—with Saibai Island in the Torres Strait situated only four kilometres from Papua New Guinea coastal villages—and where there is an international treaty agreement between Papua New Guinea and the Torres Strait that allows for the movement of people between the Torres Strait Islands and the coastal villages along with the western province of Papua New Guinea.

In my maiden speech I acknowledged that each township and community in my electorate has its own set of priorities and goals which forms the fundamentals for building stronger communities throughout the region. It has been my absolute pleasure to work closely with all of my communities to support their immediate and long-term aspirations to address social and economic disadvantage for people living in Cook.

I am very passionate about achieving positive health outcomes for people in Cook and am equally proud to see this government's ongoing investment in health service delivery and infrastructure, from Mareeba to the Torres Strait. Remoteness has always been a major factor determining health outcomes for people in my electorate. This government continues to listen in order to make the greatest difference to people's health outcomes. We listen not only to better understand the complexities underlying health outcomes but also to strategically plan for the future by investing in areas that would make the greatest impact.

Investing in infrastructure means that we can continue to deliver quality services into the future. I am pleased to see record investment flowing into the refurbishment of five primary healthcare centres in the outer islands of the Torres Strait to service local communities. A brand new primary healthcare centre on Murray Island and the redevelopment of Thursday Island Hospital and primary healthcare centre in the Torres Strait means that we can offer certain specialised services to people living right across the Torres Strait region. The Weipa Integrated Health Service received vital funds for the upgrading and refurbishment of the facility to establish a new primary healthcare clinic and birthing suite and a home for the new CT scanner, which was made possible as a result of a collaboration between Rio Tinto, Mapoon Aboriginal Corporation and the Queensland government. Our investment into staff accommodation in areas such as Kowanyama, Bamaga and Mareeba means that we can attract and support health professionals to the region.

Our children are our future and they deserve quality education, no matter where they live. This government is serious about delivering quality education by investing critical funds into building, refurbishing and maintaining our existing educational infrastructure in communities. Whether it is building a brand new prep building in Mareeba or refurbishing a science lab in Cooktown State High School, this government believes in creating a safe learning environment for all of Queensland's children. I would like to acknowledge the Minister for Education, Hon. Grace Grace, for her drive and commitment to education in my electorate. I had the pleasure of accompanying Minister Grace to visit schools in the Torres Strait and Cape York to highlight the types of challenges these communities face.

I have always seen my role as working in close partnership with the local government leadership to achieve their aspirations. The vastness of the region makes Cook one of the most complex and diverse electorates in Queensland. My electorate is the only electorate consisting of 13 local government councils and one town authority. We have Mareeba on the Tablelands, Douglas shire on the coast and many small towns and communities in Cape York and the Torres Strait.

This government continues to look at ways to work closely with local government to deliver vital infrastructure projects. Works for Queensland and Building our Regions are two highly successful programs delivered, giving local councils the capacity and ownership over the projects they will deliver. These programs are delivering projects such as the Cooktown Airport, refurbishment of the Hope Vale community hall, the upgrade of the sporting field in Pormpuraaw, Iron Range Cabins in Lockhart River and the Mareeba industrial hub.

The good work of this government does not stop with delivering infrastructure and supporting service delivery. In Far North Queensland we have two World Heritage areas that are listed for their natural values: the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The Great

Barrier Reef is the world's most extensive coral reef system and the Wet Tropics contains an extremely rich and unique biodiversity. We have an obligation to protect our natural environment and biodiversity. It is up to us to do all that we can to ensure Queensland's natural environment and wildlife are safeguarded so that our future generations will be able to enjoy the environment the way we do today.

It is absolutely wonderful to be part of a progressive government—a government that is truly committed to protecting our environment and contributing to the environmental narrative for the future. In my first term, we saw legislation pass to support progressive environmental reforms like the Nature Conversation (Special Wildlife Reserves) Bill, the Environmental Protection (Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures) Bill and the Safer Waterways Bill. Most recently in this new parliament we passed the Waste Reduction and Recycling (Plastic Items) Amendment Bill 2020 to rid our state of the accumulation of single-use plastic items that clearly have no place in our environment.

Like everywhere else, we depend on viable industries to support economic growth and development. However, the geographical make-up of the region creates challenges for industries to thrive. I especially want to talk about the tourism industry as one of the key economic drivers in Far North Queensland, creating opportunities for both direct and indirect jobs. Visitors to our region use our tourism operators to explore places like the Great Barrier Reef and the Daintree, stay at our accommodation and eat at our cafes and restaurants, all the while supporting our local economy.

The more unique the products, the more enticing Far North Queensland becomes for people to visit. It gives us the opportunity to showcase our vibrant region and, at the same time, create awareness of environmental issues. Visitors come to our region to explore and immerse themselves in everything that Far North Queensland has to offer.

Let us not forget the talents in the region. If people love art like me, then the Cook electorate is the place for them. The Cook electorate is known for First Nations art with a never-ending trail of art centres from the Torres Strait through Cape York to the one in the Mossman Gorge community. They provide an income stream for local artists living in remote communities. I would love to see an art tour that takes people through the Cook electorate starting at the Mossman Gorge community and going all the way up to the Torres Strait.

Some of my favourites are the Aurukun carvings—and, in particular, the Aurukun dogs—fishing nets in Pormpuraaw and the canvas paintings in Lockhart River. I give a shout-out to local artists Silas Hobson and Thelma Omeenyo. I also love, love, love the work of Naomi Hobson from Coen in Cape York and the work of Erub Arts. I also acknowledge my favourite Torres Strait Island artists—Joseph Au, Matilda Nona and Laurie Nona, and Alick Tipoti from Badu Island. I love seeing First Nations artists succeed in their field and making a mark nationally and internationally. Art is what I see, but it is the true expression of culture and connection to place that I truly admire and appreciate.

Everything is interconnected in Cook. While I think it would be a great idea to have an art trail throughout the region, we need to make sure we have safe roads. The Palaszczuk government is a government that commits to building better roads. I acknowledge the Minister for Transport and Main Roads, Mark Bailey, for his ongoing support and advocacy to see better and safer roads in the Cook electorate. This government invested millions into the sealing of the Peninsula Developmental Road in Cape York, the Kennedy Highway between Cairns and Mareeba and the Burke Developmental Road, amongst the many other road projects in Cook.

I want to briefly mention COVID. I have listened to the contributions of others in this chamber. As an Indigenous person from a remote community and knowing the health outcomes for people in those communities, I put on record how very grateful I am to this government for all its support in safeguarding communities throughout Cape York and the Torres Strait. Not only would the challenges have been huge for remote communities, the potential impacts could have been huge. We have seen results of this right throughout the world. I am very grateful that we have not gone down the path of devastation. We are here. We can still enjoy each other's company. I can still enjoy the company of my family back home and the people I care about. It is an absolute honour and privilege to be part of this government at this time and to be talking about all of our communities right across Queensland.

I will conclude by thanking a few people. I thank the Labor Party, Julianne Campbell, Zac Beers and all the wonderful staff at the party office for their support throughout the state election. I see Mr Healy looking my way. I want to acknowledge Mr Healy as well. Thank you for all of your support. I thank the Maritime Union—Dave Lyons, Gudge, Turtle, Watto and all the other members who came on board to support me when I needed it the most. I thank my Labor branch, the Mossman/Port Douglas branch. Bill Allison, Ken Schaumberg, Jacob Matysek, Aaron Fa'oso, Fernando, Rona, Gerry and Val, Gillian and all of the other volunteers, I cannot thank you enough. I thank James Matysek in NPA, Ranietta Wosomo on Badu Island, and Aunty Nancy and Nathan in Weipa, to name a few.

I want to especially thank my family and friends throughout Cape York and the Torres Strait for all their support. I know that I will never be able to thank you enough, but please know that I am eternally grateful. My brothers, Tom, Andrew and Harry; my only sister, Florie; my in-laws; and my nieces and nephews were all very excited during the election campaign. It was all hands on deck. Thank you for always being in my corner and thank you for all that you did and all that you continue to do to see me succeed.

I thank my mum and dad for dropping everything back home in the Torres Strait to be in Cairns to support me while I was out for long days and returning home exhausted at the end of my days. I love all that you do. Thank you for your support. Your love and support is everything I need. My children, Libby, Jonah, Mosiah, and my beautiful Shay, I cannot thank you enough for just being you, for trusting me and for loving me no matter what. My baby, Mosiah, you got your first job while I was out campaigning. That was very exciting. You got your driver's licence while I was busy at work. It does not mean I do not want to be there for you. I am blessed that you are the person you are—for not giving up, for going to school every day and doing your homework and for knowing that I will be home whenever I can.

It is a great privilege and honour to stand here for a second term. I am very passionate about my communities. I love my communities. I only want to see what is best for my communities throughout this term and into the future. The Palaszczuk government has been a rock for my communities in providing support and in supporting me in the job that I do. I am very grateful for every conversation I have and for every conversation where I can take my communities forward into the future.