




Speech By
David Crisafulli

MEMBER FOR BROADWATER

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MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Child Protection

 **Mr CRISAFULLI** (Broadwater—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (2.00 pm): It is clear to all of us that the government sees child protection as nothing more than a political problem. What we saw in question time today was an absolute failure from the Premier and her cabinet to accept responsibility for the death of a young boy. The Premier can be sombre all she likes, but in the end you can show empathy without having capability, you can show emotion without undertaking action and you can show likeability and still lack leadership.

Leadership is having the ticker to stand up and face issues that are uncomfortable. For a Premier of this state to front a media conference on a Friday afternoon knowing full well not only what was in the report but also that it was going to be released by another minister so she could wash her hands clean, who was able to take one for the team as though somehow the death of a young boy did not matter, was a disgrace. That is not leadership. That is putting politics ahead of the life of a child.

What we have seen displayed again today is a failure to take accountability. Do honourable members know what it looked like? It looked like three child safety ministers, two DGs and 21 staff members—and some of them have been promoted—and no-one is accountable. Today I will tell honourable members what we have. Rather than discuss, as the report says, the manifestly inadequate behaviour, a failure in nearly every possible way, what did the Premier do today? After being sombre, she proudly said that the offenders have been brought to justice. No-one here is denying the disgraceful behaviour that was undertaken with regard to this little boy, but that is not what this is about. It is about the environment that was allowed to fester. It is about a culture within the department of not wanting to address action that led to the death of this boy. Of course we want to see perpetrators brought to justice, but wouldn't it be great if we could have a debate and a conversation about fixing a system so that maybe some others do not fall into the same category?

If media reports are correct, we have seen 18 children in the last half a decade who were known to Child Safety who died in suspicious circumstances—13 since Mason—so do not tell me about somebody being held accountable in a situation he should not have been in. Do not give me the sombre voice. Give us action. Show us what leadership looks like. Front up to the messes you have created. Do not do a Friday afternoon dump when no-one is looking.

While I am on the subject of being accountable and transparent, I want to talk about acting with integrity. People do not need to be a minister or a former minister to know what integrity looks like. A backbencher in this place is just as entitled to ask a question as anyone sitting on a front bench. I say to the Premier that if she wants to double down and try to besmirch the character of a person who has been in this building since 1992 with an unblemished record because her questions are getting under the skin of the government, she should try again because we are not backing away from this.

Integrity matters. We have a shadow minister for integrity and I intend to have a minister for integrity when we are sitting over there because it matters. We will continue to put forward quality people who will ask quality questions. They will be marked on the questions they ask—and I hope answered—not based on their title. This is not some sort of hierarchical game where only certain people are valued, where only certain questions are answered, where there is a time limit on democracy and integrity. 'That was five years ago.' No, that does not cut the mustard. Things are valid. I will tell honourable members what was not five years ago. The cover-up was not five years ago. Not knowing there was a second email account was not five years ago. We are going to continue to ask those questions. The member for Maroochydore will be a fine minister for integrity.

In my remaining time I wish to make some comments, as we promised we would when we visited the Far North. We said to the people of Cairns and the Far North that we would take their fight to the floor of the parliament, and we have done that. I want to acknowledge the Deputy Leader of the Opposition as well as the shadow minister for small business and the shadow assistant minister for night-time economy, who spent the week in Cairns in one shape or another. It is a city that is hurting. It is hurting for a range of reasons and the majority of them are beyond their control. What they need is for all levels of government to do more.

Today from opposition we have secured a small win. The idea about allowing school students to go and experience the Far North makes a lot of sense. It makes a lot of sense from an economic point of view because there is a short-term stimulus there. It also makes a lot of sense in terms of creating a generation of tribal warriors for the Great Barrier Reef. We want to see that program become business as usual not just for Cairns but also for the Whitsundays, Bundaberg and all the way across the Great Barrier Reef. We think it makes a lot of sense.

A program of this ilk, as well as incentives for travellers to go to Cairns, is not going to be the panacea to fix that city. An investment of a few million dollars is a start, but let me assure honourable members that we have a long way to go. Contrary to what we have heard, both in this place and outside it, it is not just the role of the federal government to continue a subsidy scheme. That has to happen. Not only have we advocated for it here; the deputy leader has spoken directly to the federal Treasurer in a responsible and mature way. It actually produces far better results when we do things like that, when we are forceful. It is a much better approach than childishly ripping things up and giggling. That is what advocacy looks like, not hysteria.

It is not just the federal government. There are things that fit within the purview of the state government and they need action now. What do I mean by that? There are marina operators in Cairns who are paying exorbitant fees for those berths. We want to see that reviewed. That has been well delayed, but we also want to see a waiver of those fees right here and now. We want to know that when the next round of payroll tax becomes due there will be some breathing space. We want to see infrastructure brought forward and real jobs. We want to see people in hard hats who will then put money back into that economy. That is absolutely essential right now in their hour of need.

Cairns is a wonderful city. The Far North is a wonderful region. Now, during this time when things are tough, is the opportunity for the government to bring forward new products. We have spoken about ecotourism in this state for a generation, but it has not been delivered in the way it must be.

I look to the likes of Tasmania and New Zealand. I have seen them steal a march on us in being able to use their natural assets in a respectful way. It is not about just protecting the environment; it is about enhancing it. It is about making some money out of it that you can put back into improving it. It is about giving a young kid a job at night. We in this state have found reasons not to do it when in fact there is an opportunity to do it. There needs to be a new product. The Far North has a magnificent point of difference in the tourism space. It has a bright future, but right now it needs a hand up. It needs a bit of love for a short period of time. It needs the federal government to look at ways of directly supporting those businesses that are at ground zero, but it also needs a state government that is serious about investing—investing in projects for today to get people in work, investing in projects for tomorrow to keep a new offering—and, above all, about making sure it can work right across the spectrum to deliver for the region.