




Speech By
Julianne Gilbert

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

Record of Proceedings, 11 March 2021

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Mrs GILBERT** (Mackay—ALP) (4.02 pm): I would like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which this parliament meets and also the traditional owners of the electorate of Mackay, the Yuwi people, and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging.

I would like to congratulate Mr Speaker on his reappointment as Speaker of the House. I would also like to congratulate all of the new members on both sides of this House. It is a very exciting time for them. It is also a very exciting time for the whole of the parliament especially with the Premier, Annastacia Palaszczuk, continuing to lead our great state.

The electorate of Mackay is the best electorate in Queensland. I would like to thank my community for putting their trust in me to serve them for another four years in the Labor Palaszczuk government. I will endeavour to ensure we continue to thrive and grow as a community and keep leading Queensland's economic recovery through the pandemic and well after the pandemic as well.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Premier and the Deputy Premier along with the health minister have listened carefully to the advice of the Chief Health Officer, Jeannette Young. They carried our state safely through the unprecedented pandemic. The Premier has been strong and has shown leadership that has kept us safe. She has been brave enough to make tough decisions and she has made them quickly.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank members of my community who pulled together and kept everyone safe in their homes during lockdown: the team at Meals on Wheels for delivering meals every day, disability carers for looking after our vulnerable, healthcare workers, police, ambos, teachers, supermarket workers—they all kept our communities going during lockdown.

During lockdown I made many calls to elderly and vulnerable members of my community. I am so pleased to report that I heard many, many stories of how the community of Mackay reached out to neighbours to ensure that the housebound were able to get their shopping and their medications and were not stranded at home. What was really special is that for some this was the first time they had contact with their neighbours. People really reached out.

The Premier's wise words, 'You cannot have a strong economy if you do not have a strong health response,' have played out to be fact in my electorate and across the state. The government's quick responses and work with industry on the ground have kept COVID out of our major industries. While other countries have had their mining industry interrupted, ours has continued to operate. Making quick decisions to halt interstate FIFO at crucial times has kept the industry safe and it has kept our mining industry going.

Mackay is a service centre for the mining industry, and keeping our industry safe has meant that our engineering workshops have kept busy. In fact, apprentices were employed during lockdown. This would not have been possible without the strong leadership of Annastacia Palaszczuk.

The sugarcane industry has been in operation in Queensland for about 140 years. The crushing season was able to get underway and get the 2020 crop off. If COVID was in our workforce, the mills would not have been able to start and the crop would have been left behind in the ground.

The Palaszczuk government is a jobs-growing government. We train and develop our communities to take up employment opportunities. The Mackay Resources Centre of Excellence was a 2017 re-election commitment and it has been delivered. The fact that the project was so innovative caused the Mackay Regional Council to jump on board and additional funding has meant that the centre is not just a training centre; it is also a true centre of excellence. The centre has state-of-the-art facilities with its underground mining simulator that caters for realistic work conditions in the underground mine. It also allows workers to get some of their tickets in a safe environment. It is a facility of excellence in innovation, research and development for the mining sector and also other industries that need this research. There is no other facility of this standard in the Southern Hemisphere.

Manufacturing is vitally important to Queensland's future, both in the short and long term. The pandemic has shown the vital importance of a strong local supply chain and the need to secure local manufacturing. That is why I am very excited to have worked to secure the Palaszczuk government's election commitment to create a manufacturing hub in Mackay that will focus on bioproducts, developing new industries to diversify the output of our current agricultural industries. The manufacturing hub will boost export opportunities for our agricultural industry, create jobs and support long-term manufacturing in our region. Mackay will also be home to a future foods biohub that will provide another exciting opportunity for food production and processing sectors. The biohub will research how to value-add to our existing agriculture sectors by diversifying their customer base, creating high-value uses for produce and reducing the level of produce waste.

The additional focus on innovation and technology will also create more knowledge-intensive jobs in the region. The Mackay-Isaac-Whitsunday region is surrounded by rich agriculture—sugar, grain, dairy, vegetables, beef—and aquaculture. For some time producers have spoken about value-adding and developing innovative ways to use produce unsold at market to ensure all of their produce has value, with none left in the paddock. We should not see food wasted. The manufacturing hub will enable the development of new products; for example, enriched food powders from food that will not make it to supermarket shelves because of marks on its skin or it being the wrong size or shape.

The sugar industry has been part of Mackay's history for a very long time. I have been working to ensure there is a future for the cane crop beyond the price of sugar on the world market. Cane is a versatile crop and can be used to manufacture many different products including bioplastic, carbon bricks, fibre, building materials and biofoods. The biohub has the potential to kickstart new industry. They are getting off the ground in Mackay with some exciting developments to come soon. All of the planning for these new agribusinesses is part of the Advance Queensland Biofutures 10-Year Roadmap and Action Plan. The Mackay-Isaac-Whitsunday region is ready to lead the thriving future foods industry in Queensland. I am proud that my region is not placing future growth into just one area.

As a community, we are not waiting for the future to arrive without forward planning for a skilled workforce. We need one that is agile, ready for innovation in traditional industries and skilled, ready and able to upskill for the future. The Palaszczuk Labor government is driving training in my community. Our ministers are rolling out opportunities for training and development of new skill sets and trades. I am determined that every person, whether at the start of their work life or a mature worker with years of experience, will have opportunities to grow their skills based on the work within our emerging and evolving workforces.

We do not have a crystal ball so we do not know what skills will be needed moving forward, but we can have the right support structures in place with our TAFE and universities to deliver modern training for new and advanced skill sets. The CQ Ooralea Trades Training Centre will upgrade training facilities and, as I have mentioned before in the House, with an injection of \$7.5 million, provide access to world-class training to workers who will service the Bowen Basin in terms of training apprentices in heavy vehicle maintenance. It is important to business and workers to be able to train close to home and where their jobs are.

The Palaszczuk government has continued to deliver increased medical services at the Mackay Base Hospital. The heart catheter lab is now operating at 24/7 capacity. No longer do patients need their heart issues dealt with away from Mackay. This means that fewer people need to be airlifted to Townsville or Brisbane. Life-saving services such as heart stents can be provided in Mackay. This service reduces the damage to a patient's heart. There is less loss of life and a healthier and quicker recovery for people in my region. Now it is only patients with major heart problems who need to travel for more complex services. Also, a designated orthopaedics ward is now in operation. It has specialised

nursing staff and health workers. Mackay has an ageing population, so this service is giving quality care to aged people in terms of hip replacements, knee replacements and also much needed care to accident victims. This is a great service for my community.

Planning for the brand new \$30 million Sarina Hospital is on track. This facility will provide a modern, purpose-built, state-of-the-art service to people living south of Mackay and will also complement service delivery in the Mackay Base Hospital. The staff of Sarina Hospital deliver outstanding service in their current hospital and they truly deserve this brand new hospital.

Road construction has just been going gangbusters in my electorate. The Eton Range \$189 million realignment has been completed, making the transport connection from the Bowen Basin through to Paget and on to the Port of Mackay a great and very safe road. It delivered 295 direct jobs. Then there is the famous Mackay Ring Road at nearly \$500 million. This project is open, taking heavy vehicles off the suburban streets of Mackay. We are in the middle of the Bruce Highway Northern Access Upgrade, a \$110 million project. It is being constructed as we speak. It will deliver upgraded access to the new ring-road and take pressure off Mackay Bucasia Road. For many years, the communities of Mackay and Walkerston lobbied for a bypass road for heavy vehicles taking dangerous goods to the Bowen Basin out of the main street of Walkerston. Work on the \$150 million road will commence this year, creating more local jobs for our local families.

No-one wins a seat in an election without the support of strong and loyal branch members. Thank you to the Mackay branch. You all are fantastic. I am so fortunate to have a large family that is rock solid backing me. I give a huge thank you to my wonderful husband, Frank; my daughter, Catherine, and son-in-law, Ian; my stepsons, David and Edward; and my grandchildren, Kia, Keione and Sienna. Thank you to my sisters, Michele, Susan and Caroline; my brothers, James and Anthony; their partners; and all of my nieces and nephews. My parents, Bev and Jim, are very special people. They have a very big family but support each and every one of us through our adventures.

I also put on record my thanks to Julie-Ann Campbell, Zac Beers, John Battams and their team at party office for all of their support. I also thank Gary Bullock and the UWW team for their guidance, patience and perseverance. Jake and Connor, thank you. To my friends of many years and former colleges from the QTU: your friendship and moral support is valued. I also thank Ankita, Lucy, Casey, Suzanne and Murray for their outstanding, unwavering support. I give a special thank you to the volunteers who turned up to pre-poll each day in the hot North Queensland sun. You are legends.

Right at the start the campaign was really hit by the passing of Tim Mulherin. It was really special that the Mulherin family got behind me and continued to campaign. It was very valued and very brave of them. It was great to announce during the campaign a project that was so dear to Tim's heart: his beloved Great Barrier Reef Arena, a \$10 million project. I was so proud to announce that. This project will start about midyear. It is a great project and we all will enjoy seeing the arena coming of the ground. When I sat back and thought about the last election campaign, one thing that really stood out is that Mackay is a wonderful place to live and work, surrounded by a wonderful community. Thank you to my community.