




Speech By
Julianne Gilbert

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

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PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENT

Mackay Electorate

 **Mrs GILBERT** (Mackay—ALP) (2.35 pm): On the last parliamentary sitting day of 2021 I would like to reflect on how my electorate and wider region has been travelling during the COVID-19 pandemic. To start with, I would like to thank all the health workers who are out there testing for COVID-19 and giving the jab because it is very important that we are all vaccinated. Because of the quick and decisive action of Premier Palaszczuk and her cabinet when taking advice from the Chief Health Officer, we have enjoyed a relatively free way of life.

The resource sector keeps powering ahead. The cane-crushing season has been extended to get as much of the crop out of the paddocks because of the higher than expected sugar prices this year, and that is great for our canefarmers. In most cases our local engineering workshops and manufacturers are working 24/7 shifts just to keep up with demand, so things are powering ahead.

There is also research and development happening as we meet here today. The Townsend family headed by Graham are preparing their pilot plant that could potentially change the way cane is milled so that an extraordinary number of bioproducts can be produced from cane-milling waste. These products range from single-use compostable wrappings to plastics and also to carbon bricks and many other products. Mercurius have also set up a pilot plant in Mackay producing bio jet fuel and biodiesel from cane-milling waste bagasse. These two projects alone have the potential to grow the jobs of the future for Regional Queensland and potentially relieve canegrowers of the worry of being at the mercy of world sugar prices.

Bioethanol buses are hitting the roads in Mackay. They are trialling ethanol made at Plane Creek mill just outside of Mackay. If it is successful, honourable members may be getting some of these green buses in their communities. That is fantastic for our region.

Mackay Manufacturing Hub is one of the six hubs that was launched by the Palaszczuk government across Queensland supporting our local manufacturers to step into the national and international markets. Deb Allan heads up the Mackay hub and is doing a mighty job connecting local businesses with grants that will help their businesses grow and develop. Tourism is also powering ahead. The Wildcat catamaran has launched and Tas Webber is doing a mighty job of growing the Mackay-Whitsunday tourism brand.

A huge thankyou must go to health workers, volunteers, cleaners, wardies, kitchen staff, doctors—all the adult health professionals that make up our teams in our great hospital and health services—and, of course, our great paramedics not just in my region but across the state. Their service is not forgotten. I hope everybody has a safe and merry Christmas.