




Speech By
Hon. Mark Furner

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

Record of Proceedings, 11 March 2021

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Hon. ML FURNER** (Ferry Grove—ALP) (Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities) (11.56 am): I rise in reply to the Governor's speech opening the 57th Parliament. In doing so, I pay my respects to our Indigenous First Nations people on the grounds on which we stand and acknowledge their previous and future representatives. All members of this place know that Queenslanders have faced one of the toughest years in decades during the COVID-19 pandemic. For some, that has been about their health; for some that has been about their businesses, their farms or the jobs that sustain them.

All of us in this chamber know firsthand the stories of our constituents who have been doing it tough and struggled to cope and the inspiring stories of those who have rushed to lend a hand to their fellow Queenslanders. It is in times of crisis that governments must be at their most responsive in meeting the needs of those they serve. In October the Queensland people assessed the Palaszczuk government and gave it a ringing endorsement, not only of what it has done already to keep the community safe but also of its plan for economic recovery and the future of this state.

No member here can serve Queensland without the support of their electorate. I take this opportunity to sincerely thank my constituents in Ferry Grove for once again putting their trust in me to represent them in this parliament. I am proud and grateful for that opportunity and look forward to continuing to deliver for them.

Winning every booth in the electorate this time—the third time around—was a huge success, given that when I first came to this place in 2015 my seat was the most marginal in Queensland. Of course, I am very deeply indebted to the Premier for her leadership of this state and of this government. In Ferry Grove and in communities across the length and breadth of Queensland, people voted in support of a Premier who stood steadfast in keeping them safe. This laser-like focus on protecting Queenslanders has been sustained often in the face of strident opposition from those opposite and from those in select other states who saw it as their business to question the health advice in a vain attempt to damage our great Premier. It is truly shameful to see that those attacks were aimed purely and simply at causing political damage, even when it was the health of Queenslanders that could have been the collateral damage.

One hopes that some lessons have been learned from the election results here in Queensland. Given the more recent attacks on the West Australian government—which I know will win this coming Saturday—it is possible that those lessons have once again passed them by. The strong support the Premier enjoyed at the election was justified. Her foresight in declaring a public health emergency and her strength in resisting the ill-founded calls from those opposite to open the borders—64 times—may well have saved the lives of thousands of Queenslanders.

The Premier fought in national cabinet for what Queenslanders need. She made sure that Queenslanders got what was needed from their federal government and that Queensland was heard. Clearly our state benefits from having a leader who is pre-eminent among state premiers.

Mrs Frecklington interjected.

Mr FURNER: Yes, Australia has been fortunate in that we have not suffered from the devastating COVID-19 losses faced in other parts of the world, but it is no accident. It is no accident that Queensland has fared well in this regard, and the people of Queensland have recognised it. Whether it was during the campaign at my regular coffee catch up, pre-poll or election day booths, many went out of their way to point out to me why they were voting Labor. Overwhelmingly, substantial numbers of people were saying, 'I'm voting Labor because the Premier has kept us safe,' or—get this—'I've never voted Labor before, but we are this time because she has kept us safe.' Of course the Premier cannot run the state single-handedly and we are also—

Opposition members interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Gerber): Pause the clock. You are warned under the standing orders, member for Nanango.

Mr FURNER: Overwhelmingly, substantial numbers of people were saying, as I have already said, 'I'm voting Labor for the first time because the Premier has kept us safe,' or, 'I've never voted Labor before, but we are this time because she has kept us safe.' Of course the Premier cannot run the state single-handedly and we are also well served by the Deputy Premier, who was the health minister in the previous parliament. Being calm, measured, insightful and strongly supportive of policy guided by the medical advice made him one of the faces of common sense and safety during the height of the pandemic. The face of the health advice, of course, was our Chief Health Officer, Dr Jeannette Young. It is to Queensland's ongoing good fortune to have a Chief Health Officer of the calibre of Dr Young and I think all Queenslanders understand just what a debt of gratitude we owe her.

The mandate given to the Palaszczuk Labor government could not be more clear. We have made our promises. We will deliver on those, and that is what our government does best. In my own electorate of Ferny Grove we will continue to deliver on our massive investment in local schools. Already we have invested and budgeted \$64 million in school infrastructure since I became the member in 2015. That is \$64 million driving jobs in our local community as well as improving the learning environments of both our students and our teachers. Since 2015 that represents 35 new classrooms, 26 renovated classrooms and 13 more on the way. Through the recent campaign we pledged \$5 million for a new school hall for Oakleigh State School. I look forward to seeing how this contributes to the school community.

The crowning achievement of Ferny Grove State High School's infrastructure bonanza came to fruition earlier this year with the delayed 2020 Music Gala held in the brand new 2,000-seat auditorium which I promised to deliver in the 2017 election. The auditorium project, along with the magnificent new Centre of Excellence, was delivered for the school under the inspiring leadership of Executive Principal John Schuh. Each of our schools did such an amazing job navigating construction projects and disruptions to the school's year. I want to commend them for their dedication and their professionalism. 2020 was a year which reminded many of us just what a valuable role good teachers perform in our society, and in my community I have seen evidence of the very best.

Our ongoing improvements to Samford Road will also make a daily difference to many in and around the Ferny Grove electorate. Many locals are looking forward to the Ferny Grove transit oriented development, or TOD, getting underway and creating more jobs in our local area which commenced with the foresight of the previous transport minister, Minister Stirling Hinchliffe. This project will create 700 jobs during the construction phase and another 700 ongoing jobs once it is completed. That is 1,400 jobs being created in my electorate which are going to contribute to the prosperity of Ferny Grove for many years to come. The project will also bring more than 400 additional car parks in that development supported by more than \$9 million from the Palaszczuk government.

More broadly across the state the Palaszczuk government has a mandate to deliver on the unite and recover economic plan that will see Queensland become stronger in the wake of the pandemic. We will make strategic investments in both new and existing industries to grow the jobs needed today and into the future. We will invest in the education and health services that are both needed by Queenslanders and are critical to our economic progress and development. These things are at the heart of what a Labor government does and we are proud to deliver. We will continue to take the measures needed to keep Queenslanders safe through record numbers of police, through important legislative reforms on issues such as coercive control and through managing the ongoing risk of COVID-19. These activities are the building blocks of good government, and the Palaszczuk Labor government is exactly that.

We know that the opposition does not have the same commitment to these matters. We have heard promises of a new style of opposition where measures that are good for the people of Queensland will be supported by the LNP, but already we see the same tired old approach from members of the

LNP. They whinge, they whine and they complain with nothing constructive to offer except the tired old LNP policy waffle that they have been banging on with for many years. In my portfolio alone they harp on constantly about trying to bring back the past and, even worse, they do it when they know better because the experts have told them.

Those opposite commissioned a comprehensive report on the actions needed to ensure the future of Queensland's fishing industry, but in a fit of panic they buried the report because they did not have the stomach for the work. Since then they have fought every fisheries reform measure that we have taken, to the ridiculous extent of arguing for a five-day head start for black market fishers, and opposing regulations that were essential to ensure Queensland seafood could still be exported to the world—a requirement set by the federal government.

Those opposite commissioned and received a report from the former QATC at Longreach and Emerald. We still have not seen that Ernst & Young report for seven years, yet when our government took the actions that were necessary—and the LNP knows they were necessary—those opposite lost their minds and demanded everything go back to the way it was, presumably to the mid-1970s. We understand that as an opposition they want to influence policy, but I cannot stand by and allow them to influence fashion. Living through the mid-seventies once was enough! They do not listen and they do not think and they do not represent the majority of Queenslanders. That is why they are in opposition and that is why we are in government in the state of Queensland representing the—

Mr Lister interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Pause the clock. Member for Southern Downs, you are warned under the standing orders.

Mr FURNER: That is why we are in government because we represent Queenslanders right across our proud state of Queensland.

In conclusion—and this is not a statement that anyone in this chamber would be unfamiliar with—we only get here through the support of our volunteers and primarily our families. Today I am proud to recognise Troy, Danielle, Xavier and Marley in the gallery. Unfortunately my wife could not be here today, but my other two daughters Sally and Stacey helped out extensively on the campaign and I recognise them for that.

Madam Deputy Speaker, my address-in-reply speech has been reviewed and approved for incorporation. As such, I ask that the remainder of my speech be incorporated in the *Record of Proceedings*.

The speech read as follows—

Speaker, it has been my absolute privilege to serve the people of Queensland as the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries, and I thank the Premier for once again trusting me to continue in that role.

Adding the portfolio of Rural Communities is an additional honour. Like many Queenslanders, I feel a special affinity with the iconic rural towns and communities that are famous throughout Australia and in many cases throughout the world.

This Palaszczuk Labor Government has shown a particular and I think special understanding of rural and regional issues, and understands that Queensland is made up of much more than Greater Brisbane and its surrounding areas in the South East.

What would Queensland be without the spectacular tourism regions that bring vital tourism activity but also a richness of culture and diversity into our state?

What would Queensland's economy be without the rich agricultural traditions that continue to earn billions of dollars both domestically and through our increasing export markets.

And what would Queensland's regional cities be like without the rich tapestry of home-grown locals, visitors and migrants who make up the wonderful communities and business networks that we all prosper from.

Speaker, if I see one thing in the Palaszczuk Government's Cabinet, which I am proud to be a part of, it is that we don't have stay-at-home Ministers.

We have ministers who travel throughout the State, who meet the people involved in things both great and small, who connect with and listen to Queenslanders as people, and respect the people they meet.

That is a major part of the strength of this Government—we respect Queenslanders and we hear what they say. We govern for them, and as a Cabinet we do not lose sight of that.

In my portfolio we have recorded some significant achievements over the last five years, and there is more to come.

While I have spoken already about the Government's response to Coronavirus and its impacts, I must talk about the response particularly in my portfolio areas.

Queensland was the first state in the nation to declare Agriculture an essential industry.

This had real practical impacts on the ground. It was vital for our farmers and the food supply chain to understand that we had their backs, and we sure did.

We quickly formed the Agriculture Coordination Group, with more than 70 key stakeholders meeting regularly—at least weekly—through the early stages of the COVID crisis to raise any and all issues of how the pandemic was affecting the industry.

This was vital to protect jobs, vital to protect our farmers and also vital to protecting the supply of fresh Queensland produce that Queenslanders and so many other Australians rely on each and every day.

My thanks go to all of the participants in that group. It gave industry the direct connection to Government decision makers that they needed at that time, and gave our senior Departmental officers exactly the insight into the situation that they needed to manage it well.

It is fair to say that the level of cooperation and coordination between industry and Government through this process was unprecedented, and I think it bodes well for the future to know what we can all achieve when we work together on critical issues.

Of course, the pandemic is not over yet. The fact that the vaccine rollout has begun is extremely encouraging but we are not taking our eye off the ball.

The economic recovery plan is in full swing, and across the state it is wonderful to see that Queensland has already recovered more jobs than were lost during those first intense few months.

That doesn't mean the work is done. There is a long way to go. But the Palaszczuk Government's approach of getting the health response right has put Queensland in an excellent position to be at the heart of Australia's economic recovery.

We have proudly declared that our agriculture and food producing industries will be one of the pillars of that recovery, and I have to say industry is stepping up to help us make that a reality.

Outside of the COVID issue, we have continued to deliver on our key portfolio objectives. We have been clear about what we set out to do, and we have made it happen.

We delivered the most significant reforms of fisheries management in Queensland in almost a quarter of a century, and we continue to implement the regulations and changes necessary to bed that down.

These are vital reforms to ensure that both our commercial and recreational fishing sectors still have seafood to catch.

Fishing is more than just a business or an industry—it is a way of life for many people and we support them.

We are doing that by making sure that fish stocks are at sustainable levels, meaning our children and grandchildren can enjoy the same fishing experiences and opportunities that we have.

And we will remain vigilant when it comes to policing our fisheries laws.

It is just not on for people to flout these laws, often for profit, and expect that there will not be consequences.

This is not a victimless crime. Every black market fisher who illegally takes from our waters is robbing the next generation of the ability to fish legally.

These resources belong to every Queenslanders, and we will not stand by and give a free pass to those who would exploit it for their own illegal and short-term gains.

Speaker, an industry as diverse as food production involves many stakeholder groups and organisations that play a role in advocacy and information sharing across the state.

When you consider that 88 per cent of Queensland's land area is used for primary production, it is no surprise that there are many of these groups. It makes sense that there are specialist organisations for certain kinds of livestock or crops, and they are passionate advocates for their industries and their members.

I would like to thank the Queensland Farmers Federation, Growcom and AgForce for their consistent contributions towards growing agriculture in this state.

That is not to in any way minimise the contributions made by so many more organisations, both large and small, to growing and adapting agriculture and fisheries industries right across Queensland.

I look forward to continuing to engage with these and other organisations to ensure that these important industry voices play their role in the exciting future of food production in this state.

Speaker, Ministers rely on the hard-working women and men of their departments to execute Government policy, engage closely with community organisations and individuals and highlight issues as or even before they arise.

As Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries, I have the honour of being supported by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many people in the Department who have served this state with distinction over the last year.

The Pandemic put challenges on every Queensland workplace, and that was no less true of those whose commitment is to supporting our agriculture and fishing industries.

In particular I would like to again acknowledge the remarkable contribution of Dr Beth Woods, the recently retired Director-General of the Department.

Dr Woods has shown a remarkable commitment to public service in this state, and made a significant contribution to the advancement of agriculture in Queensland. She has always been dedicated, passionate and focussed on the end goal of getting better outcomes for Queensland and for Queenslanders. I, and many Queenslanders, are grateful for her services.

To run a campaign to be elected to this place it takes a lot of support, and I am grateful to have been supported in my efforts to provide strong representation for the people of Ferny Grove.

I would like to thank the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association, the Services Union, the Transport Workers' Union and the United Firefighters Union QLD Branch for their efforts and contributions to the great result we achieved in October.

Of course, without the great Queensland Labor Party I would not have this opportunity, so my thanks also go to my organiser Mitchell Kingston, State Secretary Julie-Ann Campbell and Assistant State Secretary Zac Beers.

Without our volunteers a campaign would be simply impossible. I can't name them all, but my thanks go out to them.

In particular I would like to thank Mike and Bronte Bailey for their spectacular efforts across pre-poll, election day rosters and sign sites.

Thanks to Christine Doolan and Ali Gibbs for their election preparation support, and thanks also to Laurence Brown and Geoff McKay for their important support.