




Speech By
Ray Stevens

MEMBER FOR MERMAID BEACH

Record of Proceedings, 25 February 2021

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Mr STEVENS** (Mermaid Beach—LNP) (3.25 pm): I am pleased—as the runner-up in the hotly contested ballot for the Speaker's role, a position I have coveted for several years now—to have this opportunity to deliver my address-in-reply to the Governor's speech, but I guess I will have to wait until the 58th Parliament to deliver it as the Speaker, even though I lost to a very worthy opponent. In responding to the speech of the Governor—Her Majesty the Queen's representative in her aptly named state of Queensland—I must admit to bingeing out late at night on the Netflix series *The Crown*. It is series 4 and a great show and I shall refer to it later in my speech.

It is my very great pleasure once again to represent the good people of the Mermaid Beach electorate in the 57th Parliament of Queensland. In doing so, may I also give thanks to their wisdom at large for returning me as the member for Mermaid Beach—and also a great thank you to the LNP members of the Mermaid Beach branch who continue to preselect me to further their interests in the parliament of Queensland.

My job as an opposition member is to keep this Labor government honest. Although that is an impossible task, I will continue to prosecute their tardiness for the full term of the 57th Parliament. I would also like to thank the previous LNP leadership team of Deb Frecklington and Tim Mander in the 56th Parliament as I know they left nothing out there on the field in their quest to deliver the LNP government for this term. However, it was not to be, given the unique circumstance our first fixed-term election was conducted amidst, and I doubt any alternative to the current Premier and her government would have been chosen by Queenslanders in these unusual and emotional health parameters.

It was an election like no other I have experienced, where the key performance indicators of a good government were completely ignored and the nightly news and morning newspapers focused on the footy score coronavirus statistics and the Chief Health Officer's advice to the detriment of any other government barometer. The Premier became the corona queen of Queensland, keeping interstate borders closed and concentrating totally on the fear factor of this worldwide pandemic killing millions of people in other parts of the world and making many more sick on a daily basis.

The real state of Queensland economically and socially through law and order was a lost conversation in the election period and got completely overshadowed by the Chief Health Officer's nightly news report as to when Queenslanders would be safe again. The Morrison federal government has done the No. 1 health protection job by closing our international borders to all of the overseas hotspots, yet it is the Morrison federal government that is picking up the financial pieces for the errors made in New South Wales from the *Ruby Princess* and the incompetent Labor Premier Daniel Andrews in Victoria who let the virus escape through improper security services on quarantine hotels.

We are at the beginning of our first four-year term, a product of extensive lobbying that I started in the 54th Parliament when I was Leader of the House—as the late Tim Mulheim, our current Speaker Mr Curtis Pitt, the then shadow attorney-general Mrs Yvette D'Ath and Billy Byrne could attest to—and I wholeheartedly still support the concept of a fixed four-year term. Some of my colleagues have commented on what a bad idea it was, but we were not supposed to be in opposition.

Magnificently, the Gold Coast has re-elected the LNP in 10 out of 11 seats. Again, I pay tribute to young up-and-comer 'Slamming Sam O'Connor', who increased his margin in Bonney in an otherwise dismal outcome across the state for the LNP. Of course, I could not represent the fabulous people of the Mermaid Beach electorate without the unflinching and loyal support of my lovely wife, Ruth, and our family and her long-term understanding of the political demands of my career that enables me to serve my constituents 24/7. I would also like to pay tribute to my long-term branch chairman, Jazz Lee, and his SEC team who deliver 100 per cent to their members time and time again, which delivers a great outcome for the LNP in the Mermaid Beach electorate.

I would like to thank my two lovely ladies, who I hope are watching, in the Mermaid Beach office, Lisa and Mel, who are ever so helpful to constituents seeking advice and who always have a smiling face for visitors, even if a few of them would test Job's patience. Of particular significance in the Mermaid Beach ballot was the campaign of one candidate based almost solely on the implementation of the Gold Coast city council proposal called the Oceanway. This, in essence, is a four-metre wide concrete cycleway/walkway structure built over pristine sand dunes and sand grasses from Main Beach through the Mermaid Beach electorate beachfront. At a cost for the first section of over \$6 million for a structure built east of the A-line rock wall, it is identified as sacrificial infrastructure. This project is bureaucratic madness gone haywire when we already have nature's perfect walkway called 'the beach'. As for cyclists in their mamill gear whizzing along the cycleway, there are many designated cycleway spaces on our roads to accommodate their needs. Let's not concrete paradise.

Where is the Greens party when we need it to stand up for a genuine environmental vandalism cause? The Labor-Green alliance had the power to stop a cableway to Springbrook, but they do not care about concreting our beaches. In fact, the Labor-Green alliance have already managed to stop a cableway project on the Gold Coast which would have provided for 580 permanent jobs and 1,300 jobs in construction. I get the feeling if that mob opposite stays it will be the 'Ray Stevens memorial cableway'. The proof is in the pudding, as they say, of the election result when the candidate crusading on the Oceanway got 500-odd votes and only 1.7 per cent of the total electoral votes. Even the informal vote got six per cent, so that should tell everyone what the Mermaid Beach electorate thinks of the Oceanway proposal.

A rising concern in my electorate is the increasing prevalence of serious crime with troubled recovering drug and alcohol addicted patients being housed in inappropriate accommodation without necessary supervision. When these folk, unfortunately, succumb to revisiting their previous addiction, the outcome for the community is intimidating, threatening and in some cases dangerous. This situation is exacerbated by the absence of enough of a police presence, who routinely complain about their babysitting duties at quarantine hotels and their checkpoint usherette duties at the borders in Queensland. The redirection of these valuable police resources without further embellishment of policing numbers on the Gold Coast is an invitation to would-be criminals that says the Gold Coast is open for dirty criminal activity.

In a corollary of the Palaszczuk government's failure to protect its citizens, their weakening of the youth justice legislation has led to teen criminals stealing cars without fear of retribution by the courts. Their modus operandi of stealing car keys after breaking and entering houses to joy ride in swish European model cars is an epidemic in itself across the state and can be laid squarely at the feet of our blindfolded justice lady who turns the other cheek to repeat offenders. It is just not good enough.

On a local note, the light rail stage 3 will be starting in 2021, 85 per cent of which travels through my electorate. I have already negotiated a better outcome for a large power-generating building in Annette Kellerman Park near my office. For those who do not know, Annette Kellerman was Australia's earliest naked mermaid in shows across America in the early 20th century. Perhaps that is how Mermaid Beach got its name. I promise the House that I will not replicate her infamy.

The light rail stage 3 will bring with it higher density housing and more high-rise development, as I have warned my constituents repeatedly. My big concern is the increase in traffic caused by the increase in density as, according to the department of transport's own figures, 95 per cent of new residents of the high-rises in the area will drive a car. Parking in the streets will also be at a premium as the seven per cent of commuters who use light rail will probably still own a car as well for socialising on weekends.

That is the perfect segue into my next call on behalf of Gold Coast residents, which is for council to provide more bridge crossings across our rivers to enable increased traffic generated by the thousands of extra people relocating to the Gold Coast every year to travel around our city. The very reason people move to the Gold Coast is the wonderful lifestyle generated by perfect weather and magnificent geography. We cannot smother nature's benevolence with traffic gridlock and turn our roadways into parking lots. The bureaucrats harp on about public transport but love to drive cars themselves. Perhaps the bureaucrats should be forced to use the public transport they so often lobby for.

We are a 42-kilometre lineal city with only three major bridge crossings of the Nerang River. Benowa Road is a classic four-lane road that leads to nowhere, and successive councils have been too voter responsive to address the absolute need to put more automotive infrastructure into our city. Markeri Street is another four-lane road with two-lane bridges that will require upgrading in the near future and the four-lane Rio Vista road is another with a two-lane bridge servicing it. On the credit side, the Isle of Capri bridge is currently being upgraded to four lanes in the fabulous electorate of Surfers Paradise, which is well represented by the member for Surfers Paradise, John-Paul Langbroek. This recognises the increase in east-west traffic movement generated by our rapidly growing population. I am pleased the election brought about funding commitments to upgrade the M1 and start on the alternative Coomera Connector.

This brings me to my earlier reference to the Netflix series *The Crown*. If ever there was a 'Prince Charles' of the Queensland parliament it would be the Treasurer, the member for Woodridge, Cameron Dick. When the member was given the Treasury portfolio, he identified he had no idea what the Queensland debt was and he probably still does not really care. This was written last year before the budget sittings. With Victoria going from \$87 billion to \$155 billion in debt and New South Wales going to \$200 billion, it was a golden opportunity for the Treasurer to put more debt on the credit card of Queenslanders, and I predicted it. I said \$130 billion would not be out of the question for the debt level that this Treasurer was prepared to impose upon Queenslanders' children and their grandchildren. It was only up \$28 billion, but with \$2 billion and the Labor Party and their IT projects, who cares? This means an interest bill of up to \$4 billion a year paid by Queensland taxpayers to lenders when that amount of money could buy 2½ new Gold Coast hospitals, a new M1 or several new high schools. The apathy and disdain in the Labor Party for fiscal responsibility is mind blowing and yet the Queensland electorate at large lets them escape condemnation for their profligacy and irresponsibility in this area.

That will change over the next four years as the economic reality of job losses, falling state revenues and financial hardship hit home, and the blame can be laid squarely at the feet of this incompetent Labor government. The only means they will have to combat their wilful spending will be to raise taxes, sell assets like they did with Queensland Rail and charge more levies. The 'Prince Charles' of the Queensland parliament, the member for Woodridge, will be skippering the Queensland economy '*Titanic*' towards the economic iceberg and the buck will stop with him.

On a positive note, the LNP has a brand new youthful, energetic leadership team in Mr David Crisafulli and Mr David Janetzki, who will both drive home the economic failings of this government to our Treasurer, Mr Cameron Dick. The 'double D' team will do the heavy lifting for the LNP over the next four years.

I am sure Queenslanders will wake up in 2024 to the way forward in difficult economic times. This is a worldwide pandemic. At the moment Australia has a little boom on in certain areas, particularly my area of the Gold Coast. I was told that 450,000 ex-pat Australians have returned home to Australia because of the pandemic around the world. That has led to enormous demand. They are buying via the internet properties on the Gold Coast and in northern New South Wales as well. For people on the Gold Coast, the rental market has gone berserk. That little injection into the economy will come to an end fairly shortly and over the years ahead we will get down to the tin tacks of having to economically manage Queensland. The ratings agencies will be very harsh in terms of this government's capacity to deal with this skyrocketing debt. The \$28 billion of extra debt added by the government has been earmarked not just for infrastructure projects such as the much needed M1 or other job-creating infrastructure in Queensland but also for recurrent expenditure—in other words, keeping the lights on in Queensland and keeping the Public Service paid.

It is a sad indictment on this government that it cannot manage its budget so that its revenue equates with its expenditure for the years ahead. Everyone understands that a small amount of borrowing for infrastructure that will be used by Queenslanders of the future—a small amount of debt—is a good thing for future generations; however, it was just ridiculous for this government to go into the pandemic with the highest proportionate debt across Australia while last year having the highest state unemployment rate in Australia. I think we now have gone past South Australia or one of those states. As my mate in the racing game said, 'The horse didn't come last; he is second last. He has a lot of upscope.' This state has upscope but only if Labor is not on the treasury benches.

As I said, last year's election was like no other. I doubt that we will see that again at the next election in 2024 or thereafter. I believe that Queenslanders will put their trust in an LNP government in the 58th Parliament.

I thank the Governor for his kind words in opening the parliament. I ask the Governor perhaps to send the kindest and best regards of the member for Mermaid Beach to the Royal Family, particularly my best wishes for a speedy recovery for Prince Philip, who is under a bit of pressure at the moment. We would always like to see the Royal Family governing Queensland and treating it as the wonderful state that it is.