




Speech By  
**Samuel O'Connor**

**MEMBER FOR BONNEY**

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**ADDRESS-IN-REPLY**

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (11.37 am): It is the greatest honour to be re-elected to this parliament to represent my community and a part of the Gold Coast I have loved for my entire life. From the outset and in this of all weeks, I want to again pay tribute to the extraordinary woman who this electorate is named after, Lores Bonney. Undoubtedly, Lores is one of the most accomplished people Queensland has ever produced. A pioneering aviator, she broke down barriers for women at a time in which only a single woman had been elected to this place. To have a seat in this chamber named after her is a fitting tribute to the legacy of Lores Bonney.

As the first member for Bonney, I am proud to represent Labrador, Biggera Waters, Parkwood, Arundel, Helensvale or the surrounds, the northern part of Southport, our beautiful Broadwater, the Ramsar Coombabah wetlands at Arundel with all of their unique wildlife, some of the best schools on the Gold Coast, Griffith University's biggest campus, the Gold Coast University Hospital, light rail and a thriving industrial and business area, as well as Harbour Town. I have not taken anything for granted over the last three years since I entered this place. I fell over the line in 2017 with barely a few hundred votes being the difference, so it is incredibly humbling to be back here now with a few thousand votes being the difference.

In 2017 I actually lost five of the seven polling booths on election day to Labor. The only reason I won was because of a 10 per cent first preference swing to me in Labrador, which was perhaps due to me working hard at the local footy club bar. That might have had something to do with it. In 2020, however, we won every single polling booth on first preferences except for Southport North, which was won on second preferences, and Coombabah South, which we only lost on second preferences by three votes, so there is a little bit of work to do there. Clearly, that includes many people in my area who have never voted for me or the LNP before. I want to sincerely thank them and reassure them that I genuinely appreciate their support.

I have the great privilege of being involved in most of our local community and sporting groups, a diverse range that are filled with dedicated and passionate volunteers. I want to place their names on record. We have the Multicultural Families Organisation; Men's Shed Labrador; Musgrave Mustangs Soccer Club; Labrador Hockey Club; Southport Sharks; Parkwood Sharks Rugby League; Labrador Tigers; Labrador Oztag Rabbitohs; Labrador Women's Space; Southport Labrador Cricket Club; Queen's Cricket Club; the Labrador Community Garden; several Neighbourhood Watch groups; Parkwood Heights Scouts; Labrador Scouts and Guides; local Rotary, Probus and Lions clubs; Friends with Dignity; Support the Girls; U3A; the Gold Coast Hindu Cultural Association; the Islamic Society of Gold Coast, which has the largest mosque in Queensland; Gold Coast Sri Lankans; the Bangladesh Association of Gold Coast; Kusuma Indonesia Community Australia; the CALD Action Group; Japan Community of Queensland; Eritrean-Australian Gold Coast Association; the Labrador Senior Citizens Centre; the school P&Cs at Arundel State School, Coombabah State High School, Labrador State School, Musgrave Hill State School, Southport State High School and Southport Special School, the largest special school in Queensland; the P&F at A.B. Paterson College; and, finally, Coastal Charisma; The Blenders; and now Cornerstone Chorus.

All of these and more strengthen our community. They are run by people who are proud of where they live and I will continue to do everything I can to support the incredible work they do. I have turned up to as many occasions with these groups as possible and that has given me a chance to talk to people in a relaxed environment to find out what really matters to them. These are not the sort of people who will necessarily be coming to a politician's office, but they are happy to have a chat while you are on the barbeque at a school disco or, quite regularly, at Bunnings.

Crime continues to come up as an issue regularly. During the last term I worked closely with resident groups. I ran a large crime forum and had many conversations with locals who were worried about what they were seeing in their neighbourhoods. Our area now has the Arundel Police Hub, and we need to make sure it is steadily filling with officers to get it closer to its capacity of 200 to allow our hardworking QPS to respond better to the many calls for service they receive. I have raised that issue in this House multiple times and told stories about people feeling the police are inaccessible or that their resources are so stretched they take too long to respond, if they get there at all. There is even one group of houses in Biggera Waters, Harbour Quays, where fed up residents have chosen to hire their own security company for added protection. I wish they did not feel they had to do that, but I understand how it got to this point. They want to feel safe in their homes and believe they have to take preventative action to do it.

Jobs are also one of our biggest concerns. In my first speech in this place I said the new industries of the health and knowledge precinct were imminent and could not come soon enough. Three years on, I am sorry to say how wrong I was and how much I clearly overestimated the ability of those opposite to make it a reality. Smith Collective, the old Commonwealth Games Village, is expanding with more and more people moving in and enjoying everything this precinct has to offer. What remains empty is what this government is responsible for: the almost 9½ hectares of land that should be full of cranes constructing a thriving new innovation precinct. Instead, all we have is empty bitumen lots showing the unrealised potential. Construction has not started on a single building on those lots. Billions of dollars of investment is not being capitalised on. We still have the highest unemployment rate on the Gold Coast in Bonney, sitting at around nine per cent, and I will keep fighting for more opportunities, particularly for our young people, in our area.

On the Broadwater the ongoing problem of derelict houseboats is one of the most common issues people raise with me and my office. With so many units overlooking the Broadwater in Biggera Waters and Labrador, these residents know when boats are staying on longer than they should. They can see when they are releasing their sewage straight into the water. They can see when a boat is not seaworthy and they watch as they sink and pollute our precious natural environment. People are sick of how long it takes to move these boats on with the lack of monitoring by authorities and what appears to be a policy of waiting for them to sink before stepping in. We need to take action long before these things become wrecks. Also on the Broadwater is Curlew Island. The critically endangered shorebirds on these sandbanks need more done to protect them in this unique environment.

Housing affordability is getting far worse and, for those doing it particularly tough, social housing is an issue that comes through my office regularly. Bonney has the highest proportion of social housing on the Gold Coast. We get stories from both ends of the spectrum: people who are in desperate need of housing and are waiting months if they are lucky, but generally years, to get in, and at the other end people blatantly abusing it and causing issues for the overwhelming number of people who do the right thing.

In our local schools we urgently need upgrades. I represent many fantastic teachers and support staff, and they deserve facilities that reflect the excellent work they are doing. Labrador State School actually turns 100 this year and, although it has only been on its current site since the 1950s, some of its facilities show it. The hall is completely inadequate. It is an absolute sweatbox year round and it needs to be turned into a modern community facility as soon as possible. Arundel State School still has half of its classes in demountable buildings. With almost 1,200 kids a year, they need more permanent and upgraded facilities.

On the transport front, despite all the announcements, we are still waiting for some tangible progress on the Coomera Connector, or second M1. Every day locals are reminded that the M1 is at capacity so they know we need an alternative route, but those living next to the corridor also want clarity on what is going to happen with it. It does not take six years to plan a road and we have not even seen the business case yet. With the federal government matching this project fifty-fifty, I urge those opposite to stop stalling and to get on with it.

High frequency and high capacity public transport is the only way our city will manage the extraordinary growth we are seeing. We need to stop playing catch-up and properly plan ahead. Light rail stage 2 finished construction in late 2017 and, years later, we are only now seeing the next stage

begin. The rollout needs to be one stage after the other without the ridiculous blame game in between. We need to get light rail directly down the spine of our city much sooner. Stage 4 needs to be ready to go, planned and funded to start straight after stage 3 to Burleigh is completed.

I also have not been afraid to raise council issues from time to time. The city plan update proposal is still a major issue for my area and I think few people understand the proposed changes. Development needs to be sustainable and manageable and not take away from what people love about an area. People accept density along the areas closest to the water on the Gold Coast, particularly because these have decent transport connections. When it creeps into our low density, character filled suburbs it does become inappropriate, and I will continue to stand up for Labrador and Chirn Park. I will keep raising these issues because my community think they are important.

Turning to the 2020 election campaign, I was proud to put forward a positive plan for my part of the Gold Coast. I do want to thank the former opposition leader and member for Nanango for the massive effort she put in whilst in that role. She could not have worked harder and it was devastating to fall short in the overall result. I am so thankful for her encouragement and guidance throughout my first few years as an MP and I continue to benefit from that now. The member for Nanango visited our area many times throughout the last term and always listened when I raised local issues. Many of the solutions to those problems became LNP commitments.

I do want to mention the other candidates who put up their hand to represent Bonney in this parliament, in particular the wonderful Javanmard family. Putting up your hand for politics is not an easy thing to do and all candidates should be acknowledged for wanting to serve.

My main opponent was, of course, the Labor candidate Ash Borg. In the few months that he campaigned, he, his family and a steady stream of CFMMEU members put in a huge effort. In fact, the recently released expenditure disclosures published by the Electoral Commission show their campaign spent more than any other individual Labor candidate. We kept our campaign positive and I am proud of the efforts of my team.

I wanted to put forward a really clear vision for the electorate of Bonney laid out in a plan that I have tabled previously in this House. The LNP plan included much needed school upgrades to give our state schools the best possible facilities, a multilevel commuter car park at Helensvale station to get more people using light and heavy rail, local sporting clubs upgrades, initiatives to better protect our local environment at the Arundel section of our wetlands and reform of the management of our Broadwater.

I will continue to advocate for these ideas and projects, because they were put together by engaging with my community and they clearly still support them. To see Labor come up with very little—and in some cases rehash money already committed and try to dress it up as something new—was disappointing. This was especially so in the case of the vital mental health ward upgrades for the Gold Coast University Hospital, announced way back in mid-2019 and reannounced during the campaign when work had not even started on that upgrade in the more than a year since the initial announcement.

In terms of the Bonney campaign, I was humbled by the support of my community. I had around 175 locals willing to have my face in their front yard or on their fence for a month and over 200 people helping on our polling booths or letterboxing and supporting other campaign activities. This all meant so much to me. I sincerely thank every single one of those people for putting their faith in me to represent them and, in many cases, for campaigning in an election for the very first time.

I will not be able to name all of our supporters but will highlight just a few people. My mum and dad have been incredible. They helped me letterbox and run community events for many weekends and even took the last two weeks of the campaign off work to spend every day on pre-poll. There is no better asset on a campaign than one's parents on pre-poll, especially my parents. I would not be here today without their love and support. My sister, Emily, a hardworking state school teacher, gave up many weekends to help out however she could. Pat Crotty was an integral source of advice and wisdom and succinct, direct feedback. I am thankful to have the guidance that he has picked up over many decades of service to our party and its predecessor National Party.

My electorate office team of Joe Wilkinson, Katie Omrod and Deb Rowles have been with me since I was first elected. They go above and beyond, regularly helping out at community events and initiatives in their own time. Joe and Katie are actually in the gallery today. I am the luckiest MP in this chamber to have such a professional, dynamic and hardworking team behind me. I hope to work with them for many years to come. Joe's dedication to our team and the way he leads it are outstanding. He is unparalleled in his commitment to serve our community, shown by the many roles he takes on, and I could not do this job without him. With the election out of the way, Joe finally took the chance to propose

to his girlfriend, Annike. I sincerely congratulate them and wish them a long and happy future together. Katie does a brilliant job and brings so much to the team. I am always blown away by her ideas and creativity, and I love working with her.

Nerida Smith is the secretary of my local party unit and volunteered every bit of time she could around her own work schedule to rally our troops every weekend and many mornings before work. She stood on countless roadsides waving corflutes. Her passion to get me re-elected was relentless, but it is her advice and intellect that I am so grateful for.

To the ongoing volunteers I have had in my office—Liliana, Angelina, Jordan, Jack, Emily, Benji, Abbi, Jasmine and Taryn; I have probably forgotten a couple—you all have been exceptionally helpful and spent countless hours working on projects, making calls to check in on residents during COVID, stuffing envelopes, walking the streets letterboxing community information and whatever else you could do to help.

I cannot thank enough all of those people who put their confidence in me. I am humbled to have been asked to serve in the shadow cabinet by our new leader and my neighbouring MP, the member for Broadwater. As someone who was also elected to public office at a young age, he has been a great mentor to me and I know just how passionate he is to serve and create change for this great state. I look forward to serving in this new role under the Leader of the Opposition as we work to gain the trust of Queenslanders in just under four years.

I have shown my passion for the environment consistently throughout my past term and am keen to further that and learn the issues from Currumbin to the cape. Within the first few months it has been great to meet with many stakeholders and everyday Queenslanders to hear what environmental issues they are facing and what ideas they have. We need to look at every available option to both reduce and offset our emissions. I will be looking at what the government is proposing and at what other approaches might be working in other jurisdictions. We need to do more with our protected areas, to encourage ecotourism opportunities, to better manage our waste and, of course, to tackle the overarching challenge of climate change.

I have been very open about my conviction that we need more opportunities for science education in Queensland. I wrote to the minister about getting a science centre in the health and knowledge precinct, but I seem to be expected to come up with a business case from opposition before the government will even look into it. I will keep working that project because I am very passionate about it. It is vital that Queensland is on the front foot when it comes to science education. It is how we will ensure we have jobs for the future. It is how we will keep learning from what has happened and improve things. More than any other, the last year has shown us the importance of science. I want to see more children and adults alike able to engage in science, and I will be looking to see how we can do that better.

As one of the youngest members in this House, I want to see more similarly aged people involved with politics. I would love young people to be less sceptical about politics and government and to see this as a great system that they need to be involved with to create change.

I finish with the commitment I made to my constituents at the end of my first speech around three years ago. To the people of Bonney, I say that I am here because of them and that that is what drives me. I will make myself as available as I can and encourage them to reach out to me. I will follow up with their issues and advocate for their ideas. I will serve them with passion and do my best to make them proud. That all still stands and I very much look forward to the next four years.