




Speech By  
**Sandy Bolton**

**MEMBER FOR NOOSA**

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Record of Proceedings, 2 December 2021

### VALEDICTORY

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (5.45 pm): It is again a deep honour for me to rise to represent the crossbench in our great diversity, to collate and reflect on the year past, to highlight our commonalities and our differences. Who would have thought that when we stood here last year amongst the chaos of COVID that we would still be battling this bug this Christmas?

Our incredible front liners, including our police, who are already overwhelmed fighting domestic violence, crime and irresponsible drivers, for two years now have to include patrolling our borders and hotel quarantine. Businesses have had to pivot until dizzy. They were abused when the Queensland app was introduced, paid their rent when they were not allowed to operate, and now mandates have delivered some untenable situations for our small businesses and sole operators. Who would have thought it was easier to travel overseas than to a neighbouring state? We have said it before and we keep saying it: we are one country and we need consistency between states.

Along the back here we have argued over inconsistencies in determinations, mandates, directives and announcements. We have thanked the incredible efforts of Queenslanders who have rolled up their sleeves, whether to tackle the hard parts and yards or to get vaccinated. Our communities have rallied. When they thought they had nothing left to give they have innovated, motivated and facilitated in ways they would never have previously. They came together again and again to help one another, and I express our gratitude to all Queenslanders.

These experiences, though similar, are also different for the electorates that are represented by the crossbench. Those of us on the coast, reliant on visitors for our economies, shared extremes: the trauma of businesses on the brink and workers becoming homeless through lost hours. Instability heightened mental health issues, with our electorate staff dealing with sorrow day after day. Aging populations have insufficient services, and the situation for the organisations tasked with their care has not been alleviated; nor has there been any progress with the housing crisis we spoke about 12 months ago.

Those Brisbane metro areas that are not reliant on tourism had a much different experience, with salaried staff able to work from home, providing surety and a roof over their heads. However, there was trauma for international students left without supports, residents caught interstate and internationally, and separations impacting all.

In the remote areas of Katter country and One Nation rural economies, infrastructure or keeping a job predominated as well as crime, with ongoing pleas for initiatives developed by the bush, for the bush. Logistics, water storage and the price of materials presented increased costs to living in regional Queensland, with residents leaving when they could no longer afford it. This impacts service levels at schools and medical services. Given the situation in South-East Queensland with the volume of people moving into our area, we often wonder how we can encourage them to consider the many opportunities in the regions.

The calls for the creation of a North Queensland state, amongst issues of crocodiles and feral pigs, ensured that media headlines were always colourful. As well, we have population increases with the birth of baby Katter No. 2 any day. When you look at the crossbench, it is not just seven MPs or 17 per cent of the opposition. It is three political parties plus an Independent with a geographic, economic and social diversity that is breathtaking in its expanse. Our ongoing efforts to see improvements to the parliament will not abate. In our COVID dominated world, the cry for transparency and collaboration has never been more relevant.

There were several private members' bills put forward. Where we did not support a fellow crossbencher, we respectfully articulated why. What grieves all of us is that we never got to debate a crossbench bill, with the only survivors so far being the Katter bills on blue cards and seafood. I did mention diversity! Out of all the bills we faced, it was the VAD debate that saw a clear delineation on the crossbench, with demographics and the culture of the bush in direct contrast to those who represent communities in the south-east corner. Opposition to segregation by vaccination status was another which saw differences between crossbench members. On this one, the community of Noosa had commonality with rural Queensland, which was actually surprising for all of us.

There was so much more. There was united support from the crossbench on a number of issues brought forward by the opposition. It does not happen often; however, when it came to extra time for specific bills and the need for reform of the committee and estimates system, the unity sent a clear, credible message on the change needed.

There were many achievements within our electorates which we are all grateful for, with the list too long to accommodate here—I know everyone is dying to get out to the Christmas tree. There are also so many to thank as we traversed the year. Where would we be now without our fabulous front-liners, including nurses—or, as I heard them lovingly called at an event, COVID warriors. Dr Jeannette Young, you never wavered, and we wish you many happy years as our Governor. To our new CHO, Dr John Gerrard, welcome to a very rambunctious family.

From our teachers to our retail assistants, police and emergency services, hospitality staff to QPWS rangers: regardless of where you worked, or for whom, you all formed a formidable army in this now two-year battle, and we are in deep gratitude. To the Premier, ministers, parliamentary staff and departments: yes, there were, and are, moments in the frustration as well as the fatigue where the love of our communities and our desire to do the best by them meant we may have harped on without reprieve. COVID has meant aspects essential to our community have either been delayed or waylaid, and this has been very hard. However, we appreciate all of your efforts.

Neil, there is never a year where we have not been in your debt for your sound advice as Clerk. This year saw you mount the battle against our crumbling annexe without so much as turning a hair, as well as the carpet moth invasion. This demonstrated how you can fight off any adversaries.

Mr Speaker, we all must have been much better behaved this year as there seemed to be fewer expulsions from the chamber, or have we worn you out? I think it is the other way around, as we did start comparing questions without notice word counts to determine what is the right amount to avoid reprimands on lengthy preambles. Thank you for the year, and we all agree that your fab mo should make a comeback.

From IT to catering, library services to security, Hansard, committees, corporate and housekeeping: regardless of what chaos is occurring, you make our parliamentary world a much better place and we hold all of you in the highest of esteems. And, yes, we loved those Halloween decorations, especially the more, shall I say, interesting ones.

To our many phenomenal not-for-profits, community organisations and volunteers, you are the backbone of our communities and there are never enough ways to express our gratitude. From all of us 'up the back', merry Christmas and blessings to all MPs, your electorate staff, families and communities. We want to thank you all for the many friendships. We wish you a wonderful and well-deserved break. I know how hard everyone has worked this year. We would like that break to preferably be without any outbreaks, lockdowns, floods or fires—what an amazing gift that would be. We very much look forward to seeing you all rested and raring to go in 2022.