




Speech By
Sandy Bolton

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

Record of Proceedings, 2 December 2022

VALEDICTORY

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (12.33 pm): It is a privilege to again represent the crossbench in summarising the year as well as, for the fifth year, celebrating our differences here on the crossbench. We are three political parties plus an Independent with geographic, economic and social diversity that is breathtaking in its expanse. When you think about that, we represent 17 per cent of the opposition but our electorates cover 28 per cent of the state. I think that if we can do it then anyone can.

For the third year, fallout from COVID dominated with a lack of labour and materials, skyrocketing prices, health services and the ongoing housing crisis with shared commonalities from the beach to the bush. Floods were prominent, as we have heard, and many have yet to have our houses refitted to pre-flood condition. We give gratitude that more lives were not lost and our ongoing thoughts are with those who grieve for loved ones. Our frontliners have again done an outstanding job, endeavouring to keep all safe with domestic violence repeat offenders, irresponsible and dangerous drivers as well as increased mental health issues competing with the increasing decrease in physical health. Businesses that have had to survive through two years of lockdowns, shutdowns and isolating staff now have reduced hours and sustainability issues due to ongoing staff shortages. For example, in Hastings Street we are short 60 chefs at a time when we are coming into the big season.

Of course, in Katter country and Mirani, all realms are impacted including agriculture, mining and hospitality. In the Greens' electorates of South Brisbane and Maiwar, the impact involves teachers, nurses and health clinicians. Access to federal programs such as PALM have made an enormous difference in our aged care. As an example, over 30 carers from the Pacific islands commenced in September in Noosa.

Yes, this year in the chamber we have argued over many things. However, those of us up the back hope that we follow through on the *Fault lines* report. It is so important and we all agree on that.

Of special mention: the crossbench brought forward a total of eight bills, with four moving beyond the second reading stage, including the Katter's labelling of seafood bill and liquid fuel supply bill, currently before a committee. Of special mention is their blue card for Indigenous communities bill that, after three attempts and even though not supported for passing by the committee, will lead to instrumental and urgent changes. The Greens honed in on the housing crisis with the rent freeze bill, which is currently in committee. Their age of responsibility and empty home levy bills did not move beyond the first reading and their cost of living relief bill was nearly tabled this week, however, we ran out of time. All of those bills shared a commonality, which is that they are about trying to rectify a glaring wrong in the community and those members should be heartily congratulated for them.

The crossbench represented major contrasting views to both government and opposition as well as each other. Regardless of the rights or wrongs, we contributed to the much needed diversity in the parliament. There were many highlights within that diversity.

In Katter country, we saw the opening of the renal dialysis unit at Ingham Hospital and a CT scanner for Charters Towers, with progress at Hughenden Dam, CopperString and the long sought after North Johnstone transfer project. The regional water assessment plan is well underway and close

to finalisation. For Noosa, of course, it is the work of Ramsay Health, with the assistance of government, to expand the emergency department at Noosa Hospital, the completion of stage 1 of the Tewantin bypass and the commencement of Six Mile Bridge No. 7. For Mirani, highlights include repairs and resurfacing of highways, the completion of the Mount Morgan pipeline and the reopening of the mine. A new hospital has been committed to Sarina and two positions have been awarded to Australian South Sea Islanders. The Greens were happy about indications that the government will move to legislate an affirmative model of consent and, of course, they are absolutely thrilled by the fight of their community to retain East Brisbane State School and the return of the Pride Festival to West End.

There have been lowlights but I will not go there because it is not in the spirit of Christmas. It is really hard being the last speaker because I know everybody is eager to get out to the Speaker's Green. Therefore, I will hit on something about the crossbench. The reality is that we do not vote together and it is a rarity when we agree. However, as you all know, we do stand united in some areas, including the right to be heard when a motion is put forward without notice and opposition to the shrinking opportunities through limited time allocations. I will give two examples from this sitting: I reduced my speech to half of the allotted time so that other speakers could speak and today six members on this side of the House missed out on speaking on the animal care bill. We need to do something about this. It is time. We will continue to fight for a review of the committee and estimates processes. We have all been patient, but it is time.

To the celebrations: there were so many achievements within our electorates and the list is too long to accommodate here except to offer our heartfelt congratulations. There are so many to thank including, as I have mentioned, our fabulous frontliners such as the nurses, retail workers, hospitality staff, teachers—and it goes on and on. As you have confronted different challenges, you have done so with others foremost in your minds and you have our deep gratitude.

To the Premier, ministers, parliamentary and department staff, yes, we have had moments of great frustrations and we cannot understand why response times are slow. However, there have been things we are grateful for including the long-awaited actions on housing, commitments to see an end to domestic and family violence, and progress on the Path to Treaty. Thank you all for what you do. Again, it has been an extremely challenging year.

As well, we were grateful for the determination of the Independent Remuneration Tribunal to transition our hard-fought-for crossbench parliamentary policy officers to full-time status. That was a high-five. That was really good.

To our Clerk: even with a dose of COVID you ensured that the MPs' move into alternative office space and accommodations was relatively smooth, even though it may have seemed like herding cats. The works on the Annexe are a huge job and we recognise the enormous efforts and disruption not only to you but also to all parliamentary staff.

Mr Speaker, all deputies and acting Speakers: there were some days when there seemed to be more MPs on warnings than not, and your job is not one that any of us would want. Thank you again for your continuing efforts to bring respectful debate into the chamber, which is so important. The visiting schoolchildren look to see the leadership we can provide here.

To IT, Catering, Library, Security, Hansard, Committees, Corporate, Housekeeping and every person who makes it possible for us to do our job here: thank you. Welcome to the many new staff and thank you for the decorations for special events, though can we ask you, please, to stop tempting us with those fabulous treats because it is adding to our girths!

There are no words to convey our deep gratitude to our incredible not-for-profits, community organisations, volunteers, advocates and residents of our electorates. You make the difference and inspire us as MPs to do better every day.

To our staff: let me say how much we appreciate your efforts every day on behalf of our communities. You are gold. To all fellow MPs in this chamber, your staff, families and electorates, from the diversity up the back, where our Christmas decorations range from ecofriendly, all-natural potted versions to cut-down versions and also the latest in USB powered versions: all the very best for a well-earned break. Also, extra hugs to the whips—what a job you do.

May Santa deliver rain where needed with fires only for our barbecues. I hope that under our trees are the gifts of bipartisan agreements that will assist us greatly to deliver to Queenslanders in 2023. What better time to start than now in true festive spirit out on the Speaker's Green? Merry Christmas, everyone. See you in 2023.