




Speech By
Aaron Harper

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

Record of Proceedings, 25 May 2023

MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

Phillips, Dr AF

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (9.42 am): I rise to provide my contribution to this condolence motion for Dr Anita Phillips. I start by offering my condolences to her family. I briefly met them earlier. Thank you for being here today. It is a privilege to speak to this motion. I did not think that in the last 12 months I would be speaking to two condolence motions for former members of Thuringowa, Dr Anita Phillips and of course Ken McElligott.

I got to meet Anita in 2018 at an event. We had a great chat on all things Thuringowa. Anita was very pleased that we kept government in Labor's hands following the 2017 election. Whilst we were years apart in terms of being members for Thuringowa, we had a number of things in common. The No. 1 thing we had in common was our love for the North Queensland Cowboys—although we will not talk about the result of the last game. Anita was a great supporter of the team and, as the Premier has mentioned, also the former home of the Cowboys then, the Dairy Farmers Stadium, and was in fact responsible for funding the upgrades to that facility. When we met in 2018 the new stadium was literally coming out of the ground, and I know she was very excited about that. I think she would be very proud to have seen what we have achieved.

Reading her maiden speech in April 2001 it was clear that her political motivation came from her parents, coming from a working class background and living in a housing commission estate on outskirts of Melbourne. Interestingly, I note she lived in a struggling community with high juvenile crime and a poor community image. I believe Anita came with a vision for change and to lift the image of Thuringowa. She had qualifications as a social worker when she moved to Townsville—indeed, it is a tropical paradise. Anita worked hard in the community setting up that retail business and then becoming only the second social worker at the Townsville General Hospital. When I said we had things in common, in 1985 I commenced work at the old Townsville General Hospital before joining the ambulance in 1990. I know the value of social workers, particularly in times of crisis, so I pay tribute to Anita's role there. She had done that with her friend and fellow social worker, Joan Innes-Reid.

Anita proudly represented the Townsville seat of Thuringowa in the Queensland parliament between 2001 and 2004, beating One Nation turned Independent candidate Ken Turner before quitting and unsuccessfully standing for the federal seat of Herbert held by the Liberal Party's Peter Lindsay. After being elected Anita had three priority areas for the people of Thuringowa: to help the most vulnerable, create employment and expand people's lives through fun and enjoyment. I did remark to the family earlier that there will be a little bit of fun from the current member of Thuringowa today at around two o'clock, and I am glad you will not be here for that.

Anita had a passion for community renewal, particularly in the Upper Ross, and I expect she would be very happy to see the duplication of Riverway Drive—of course I had to get that in there—and the \$50 million it has developed in the private investment we have seen, which has created more jobs.

I know that she would be enormously proud to see the low unemployment that Townsville has right now at two per cent. In her maiden speech Anita mentioned a skate park. How proud Anita would be to see our beautiful Riverway precinct, which holds so many community fun days for the good people of Thuringowa today. The new council library has just moved over there as well. Anita also pushed for a bridge to cross the Ross River at Condon. That major work connected our cities. She was then working with the minister for transport and main roads to get it done, connecting the hospital, the university and Lavarack Barracks to the Upper Ross. How ironic that I now work with Minister Mark Bailey on that same ring-road. I note the names in Anita's maiden speech who helped her get elected—names that are not unfamiliar to me; names that remain in our branch—Mike Reynolds and Mick and Evol Keane, who are Thuringowa branch members to this day. It is clear we have many similarities.

On 4 February 2023 Dr Anita Frances Phillips passed away at the Sunshine Coast University Hospital following a short illness. Anita's daughters Rebecca, Melanie and Keinton were at her side. Anita's three surviving sisters Diana, Juliet and Melissa were all able to spend time with Anita in her final days, which was indeed a blessing.

A senior member of the Albanese government, the Hon. Bill Shorten, paid tribute to Dr Anita Phillips, describing her as 'incredibly active in progressive causes' and holding 'strong Labor values'. Former Queensland premier Peter Beattie also said—

Anita was a powerful advocate for the people of Thuringowa and a trail blazer for women in Queensland politics at a time in Queensland when both were a challenge. She was a key part of the Labor team in 2001. Her strength of character and determination were admired by both sides of politics.

To her family and friends either here today or watching this, thank you for giving us Anita Phillips. Her time in serving the good people of Thuringowa will not be forgotten. Vale, Dr Anita Phillips.