




Speech By
David Crisafulli

MEMBER FOR BROADWATER

Record of Proceedings, 16 March 2023

MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

Johnson, Mr VG, OAM

 **Mr CRISAFULLI** (Broadwater—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (9.45 am): The opposition offers its wholehearted support for this motion recognising the life and contribution of Vaughan Johnson, former member for Gregory. The passing of a former member, particularly one who served in this parliament and served his community for over 25 years, is even more poignant because many of us regarded Vaughan not only as a colleague but also as a mate. Through his unique approach to parliamentary life, he managed to make our shared time here more fulfilling, more amusing and more grounded.

Vaughan Johnson, although born in New South Wales, was a genuine son of Western Queensland and of Quilpie. It was in Quilpie that he was educated at the local convent run by the Sisters of St Joseph, raised a family, worked as a grazier and contractor, and began his long and distinguished record of service to the people of the west. His local contribution included positions in the local and regional Rugby League, the Lions Club and the Pony Club. He served on the Quilpie Shire Council and was a member of the Quilpie hospital board, a solid grounding for his latest service to this parliament.

Upon the retirement of Bill Glasson, Vaughan was elected the member for Gregory in 1989. His quarter of a century in this parliament was taken up by championing the needs of the people of the west. His first speech, on 7 March 1990, highlighted the difficulties faced by the sheep and cattle producers of the region as well as demonstrating the potential of a new industry, tourism, particularly centred on the recently opened Stockman's Hall of Fame in Longreach.

Vaughan owed his loyalty to the people of Gregory. He pointed to the loss of economic importance, population and services in rural towns. The state of health, ambulance services and education were his high priorities and he was deeply conscious of the need to provide adequate services in the west to retain both the young and the elderly. During his six years in opposition, Vaughan built a reputation as a vocal and passionate advocate for the people of Western Queensland. His service as shadow minister culminated in his appointment as Minister for Transport and Main Roads in the Borbidge government from 1996.

In opposition from 1998 Vaughan served in various shadow portfolios and was appointed Chief Government Whip upon the election of the LNP government in 2012. It was in this role that I came to know Vaughan best and the value he placed on family. I recall going to him on one occasion with a request for leave from this parliament. He said, 'If you want to leave on Thursday to attend a breakfast meeting in your electorate, the answer is no. If you want to leave early and have breakfast with your kids, the answer is yes.'

Vaughan was not one for airs and graces. On a visit to Longreach he was lamenting that a new restaurant in town was trying to offer its clients a more up-market service, a more expensive experience. Accordingly, it had replaced VB with Crown Lager. Vaughan understood the objective, but he said, 'I'm happy to pay extra. I just want VB.'

If there was one word that can describe Vaughan's time in this parliament it would be 'colourful'. He was never afraid to say what he thought and he believed he was better off if he could share that wisdom with all of us. Former member for Warrego Howard Hobbs told the story in 2014 that his party was worried when Vaughan was first elected and sent a senior politician to pass on some instructions. Mr Hobbs said, 'He had to tell Vaughan to do three things: to stop swearing, to stop drinking rum by the gallon and to stop bloody fighting.' Honourable members can make up their own mind whether any of that advice was ever heeded.

Vaughan retired from parliament in 2015. In his post-parliamentary life he was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia and served in a number of roles including as a drought commissioner. It was in this role that he acted as a conduit for the challenges facing the people of the west.

Vaughan Johnson will be remembered as a true champion of the west. He gave unstintingly of his time and made efforts to help those people who lived in often challenging conditions. Any member of parliament today who develops a reputation as a community advocate as enthusiastic and committed as Vaughan Johnson will have much to be proud of. Vaughan has left a mark on this House. His unique style, his enthusiasm and his dedication will be remembered by all of us for a long time.

Despite the circumstances, we are pleased to welcome to the House Vaughan's former wife, Robin; his three children, Monique, who I first met running a hotel in Jundah—and how proud of you he was—Tanya and Michael; their partners, Bill Grant, Christopher Scott and Ariel Cao; two granddaughters, Emma and Molly Forsyth; and Emma's fiancé, Robbie Storey. We share their loss and are grateful to them for allowing Vaughan to spend the amount of time that he did with us. This parliament was the poorer for Vaughan's retirement; we are all poorer for his passing. Vale, Vaughan Johnson.