




Speech By
Jarrod Bleijie

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

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MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

Ahern, Hon. MJ, AO

 **Mr BLEIJIE** (Kawana—LNP) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (10.01 am): As we have heard today, Mike Ahern was a man of integrity. As the opposition leader described, Mike himself said that he was a parliamentarian foremost before a politician. That said, Mike believed fundamentally in the party political system in Queensland. His enthusiasm for meetings was described by the Leader of the Opposition—meeting with our party members and our membership—and is well-known and continued well after he left parliament. I know that Mike's enthusiasm for attending party meetings and events carries through to all of the LNP members today, who particularly love the frank and strong advice that our wonderful members give us from time to time, no doubt as they did when Mike attended all those meetings.

It is hard to fathom how big the electorate of Landsborough was. If you go back to the original map of the 1949 redistribution you see that the electorate of Landsborough included Nambour, Landsborough, Caboolture, Woodford and right out to Kilcoy and Somerset. I mention this because I know that some of my own colleagues who represent regional and rural Queensland always whinge about how hard it is to get around their electorate. Some members even have to have little planes to fly around. The Sunshine Coast also had big electorates once upon a time. It was just as hard for people elected on the Sunshine Coast, like Mike Ahern, to get around their electorate because it was so big.

As we saw, after the redistribution in 1958 the boundaries started squeezing in more towards the coast. The redistribution of 1971 included Maroochy, Landsborough and down to Bribie Island. Then, of course, after Mike's election in 1968 there was a redistribution in 1977. It then included Caloundra, Landsborough and Maroochy. Then in the 1986 redistribution it was further contained into the coastal strip and in 1991 the redistribution saw the electorate include Noosa, Nicklin, Mooloolah and Caloundra. I had the pleasure of representing such a large portion in Kawana that Mike represented in the old Caloundra city days, in the old Landsborough shire council days, right up to the Mooloolah River and down to Caloundra, Meridan Plains, Little Mountain, Aroona and Currimundi.

We have seen the great changes. I was talking to Mike's daughter Sharon earlier. She would often drive through the electorate up Nicklin Way—named after Mike's good friend the former premier Nicklin—and over the Ahern Bridge in Currimundi. Mike would reflect on the times when he was a member of parliament for so long for that area and the developments. There was legislation that went through the parliament that dealt with canal estates and he talked about how to get the balance right and what was happening. Mike participated in that debate in 1979. Sharon was telling me that Mike would often reflect on the decisions he had to make back then and the briefings he received by the shire council and also the state ministry about how they were going to proceed with the development that is Kawana Waters at this time.

Many people may not know that Kawana Waters, from Battery Hill north, was used in the war and there are unexploded ordnances including at the newly created Bokarina Beach, which has beautiful houses on it. However, I am assured that all the unexploded ordnances have gone. They did not find any in the excavation—they found a couple! Sharon was telling me that Mike would often refer to the developments coming out of the ground and say that they used to be the firing range with all the unexploded ordnances and the challenges they had to deal with in getting development in what was swamp land through the Kawana estate right through to where the Kawana Waters State College is now, the developments and the building of the canal estates. In fact, the year before Mike was elected in 1968 the Kawana Waters estate was approved. Sir Frank Nicklin was cutting the ribbon of the Kawana Waters estate and the rest is history. The Kawana as we know it today is the result of decisions made way back in the early sixties.

When Mike represented my electorate you could get a three-bedroom house for \$9,700—I think that was on the canal, too—which was still a lot of money back then. You only had to pay a \$50 deposit and you could get a piece of land for \$1,980. As I said, a bridge further south of the Kawana Waters estate over Lake Currimundi on Nicklin Way that had been opened in January 1964 was later named the Ahern Bridge in Currimundi after premier Mike Ahern and his family. He reformed the committee system; he advocated for changing it. He introduced domestic violence legislation into the parliament. His parliamentary record is clear and has been well articulated today.

I want to share a story of a constituent of mine, Joy Sandham. Joy, on hearing the news of Mike's passing, sent me an email. She said—

Hi Jarrod.

...

Finally, I note on the news just now that Mike Ahern has passed away. In the 1980's he was our State member. I met Mike on a number of occasions and really liked him. I found him very approachable. In 1982—

Incidentally, when I was born—

we moved to the Sunshine Coast as we didn't want to have to send our children to boarding school. We built the first house in Bokarina on the corner of Wyanda Drive and Bluebird Parade. Then when we found out that the Council intended building an Ocean Outfall at Bokarina for all the sewerage—I was involved with the group who tried to stop it from happening. After several months collecting signatures at shopping centres etc. Mike Ahern presented our petition in parliament. At the time, I believe it was one of the biggest petitions ever presented in Queensland.

Unfortunately, Joy says the ocean outfall eventually did go ahead. Mike spoke about this petition when he presented it. Where the Ahern family are sitting in the gallery today, one Joy Sandham also sat at that time. Mike mentioned her. He stated—

On behalf of my constituents, some of whom are in the gallery today, I presented a petition to the Parliament this morning. I did so with pleasure. As their representative, I exercised their democratic right to present a petition to the Parliament.

He then went on to talk about the Landsborough shire council. Joy's experience of Mike was that he was a man of integrity who represented his constituents well, was able to meet onsite and presented the petition which contained about 8½ thousand signatures.

The group that they had established way back in 1987, when the petition was presented to parliament, was called CRAAP-PROOF, standing for Concerned Residents Acting against Pollution and People Resisting Ocean Out Fall. That was a long acronym for the time and we have come up with some beauties recently. They tell me that they were sitting in the gallery and they all had their T-shirts on and security told them to cover up. Some 40 years later, nothing has changed; when people come into the gallery with political T-shirts on they are asked to cover up. She also said—

In 1987 I lobbied him to get traffic lights at the Wyanda Drive/Nicklin Way intersection. Bokarina Primary School opened in January 1987 and 90% of the children had to cross the Nicklin Way to get to school. My younger daughter was one of them. There were no traffic lights at any of those Nicklin Way intersections.

He wasn't the Premier at the time, however, he met me at the intersection at 8am one school day. I asked him if he would like to have his children crossing the road without lights and he replied, that he wouldn't like to have to cross that busy road. Diane was 9 at the time and she asked him if he was the boss of Queensland. He laughed and said No—

not at that stage—

We got the lights—

on Nicklin Way. Joy has dug out newspaper article cuttings from the time. One states that 'the estimated ultimate population in the Caloundra-Kawana area is 155,000 persons'. The Sunshine Coast population has absolutely ballooned in that time.

Some former colleagues in this House wanted to be associated with my remarks, including Mark McArdle, the former member for Caloundra, who attended the state funeral for Mike Ahern. He reflected on how wonderfully the children spoke at Mike's funeral and how blessed we are as a society to have not only Mike but also his wonderful family, whom we met at the state funeral. Mark would reflect on Mike's time in Caloundra. He lived in and loved Caloundra, including the beach walks and teaching his children how to deal with problems like waves coming towards you—'dive through it or under it, beat it and you'll come out into the clean air'. He was a humble man who never went out of his way to seek the spotlight—not dissimilar to the current member for Kawana, I suspect!

Those comments were echoed by former member Lawrence Springborg. Lawrence Springborg wished to be associated with these remarks, as did Joan Sheldon, former member for Caloundra and former deputy premier of this great state. Joan advised me that she loved Mike and that he did a great job as the local representative. She was sorry to see him pass. Andrea, Joan wishes me to pass on her apologies that she was unable to attend the funeral for her own health reasons. She loved catching up with Mike at past members functions. She said that he was compassionate and understanding.

Thank you, Mike, for a life of service to community. Thank you, Mike, for your advocacy of Caloundra and Kawana. I thank Andrea and all of her family members for allowing Mike to sacrifice his special time for the good of Queensland and all of its people.