




Speech By
Barry O'Rourke

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

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VALEDICTORY

 **Mr O'ROURKE** (Rockhampton—ALP) (5.41 pm): I stand here to deliver my final speech in this House. My heart is filled with mixed emotions. First and foremost, I want to thank my wife, Sue Ann, who has been extremely patient and understanding over the past seven years—and thank God she still speaks to me! To our sons—Jim and his wife, Kelsey, and Harry and his partner, Hannah—your encouragement and support has been wonderful, and I thank you for your understanding when, on occasions, unfortunately, work had to come first.

Serving as the member for Rockhampton and representing the Labor Party in this parliament will remain one of my proudest achievements in my professional life. Representing the residents of Rockhampton and Gracemere has been not only humbling but also a great privilege. I first moved to the Rockhampton region more than 30 years ago. A lot has changed in that time but a lot remains the same. It is still the kind of place where you cannot visit a shop or walk down the street without coming across a friendly face or 20. I hope that never changes. I am very proud of my record of delivering for our region. We were ignored in terms of local infrastructure funding under the Newman-Crisafulli government of 2012 to 2015, but that has been rectified on our watch.

Like other communities, many locals are struggling with the cost of living. The support from the Miles government has been unprecedented: every resident has had \$1,000 off their energy bill; rego costs have been reduced by 20 per cent; and locals can access free kindy, free TAFE and Putting Queensland Kids First funding. You can even catch a bus from Rocky or Gracemere to Yeppoon for just 50 cents. We know that all of this will be on the scrap heap under an LNP government, so tough times are ahead for Central Queenslanders if the Leader of the Opposition, David Crisafulli, becomes the premier next month.

Of course, Rocky ratepayers are already paying through the nose because of the decisions of the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Crisafulli. This is the man who, as local government minister, drove the case for deamalgamation and stacked the decks in the ballot so that Rocky locals could not vote in it. This has left both Rocky and Livingstone councils with an unsustainably small rate base, and it is the Leader of the Opposition's appalling actions that have continued to tighten the screws a little bit more every year.

His partner in crime in all of this was, of course, former Rockhampton mayor Margaret Strelow, who betrayed the Rocky community by refusing to campaign against deamalgamation. She vacated the field and ran off to London when she could have been standing up for Rocky. Her treachery costs us more every year. If that was not bad enough, she then went on an unsustainable spending spree by promising \$20 million to build a new airport for Adani, building an art gallery and commissioning a \$100,000 portrait of herself—that was a massive drain on council funds. She tried to impose on us a \$189 million flood levy that would have been another massive, ongoing drain on finances and she botched the upgrade of Quay Street by hand-selecting foreign-made granite as the surface, against expert advice. We continue to foot that repair bill every year.

It did not surprise me at all to read last year that Ms Strelow and the Leader of the Opposition had struck a secret preference deal. This partnership has already cost our community so much and I hate to think how much more damage they could do with Ms Strelow backing an LNP government.

Despite all of this, Rocky is currently benefiting from a massive pipeline of infrastructure investment from the Labor state and federal governments. During my time we have seen major projects realised—projects that have created jobs, improved infrastructure and enhanced the quality of life for our residents. The completion of Rookwood Weir is creating a significant boost to the region's water security and will drive economic growth and job creation for generations to come.

The Capricornia Correctional Centre expansion and upgrade have not only enhanced our correctional facilities but also created an additional 200 ongoing good, full-time jobs. The Alliance Airlines maintenance facility has created over 100 good aviation jobs and many other smaller projects that have contributed to our local economy. Investment in our road infrastructure and accessibility has always been a priority, and I am proud of the achievements we have made in this area. The northern access upgrade, the Capricorn Highway duplication to Gracemere, the Laurie Street upgrade and the many other road infrastructure programs have significantly improved connectivity and safety for our residents.

We have seen a record \$873 million allocated in the 2024-25 budget for the Central Queensland Hospital and Health Service. I want to acknowledge our wonderful staff in the health sector and across the whole of the Public Service in Rocky. They do a wonderful job. Across the Central Queensland area, we will see an investment of \$41 million this financial year to expand and improve social housing. Currently, there are more than a dozen homes under construction in Rocky.

Since 2015, the Labor government has invested \$138 million in building and maintaining education infrastructure in the Rockhampton area and there are plans to spend an additional \$55 million this financial year providing our children with better educational facilities, building a brighter future for our community. I am particularly proud of the investment in our two special schools, the hall for The Hall school and the upgrades to our school tuckshops and playgrounds. There is a massive list of upgrades, and I can confidently say that every school in the Rocky electorate has received funding.

The Works for Queensland Program, with over \$36 million delivered through the Rockhampton Regional Council, has funded over 40 smaller projects enhancing our sporting facilities and community spaces. These projects may seem modest individually but, collectively, they have made a substantial difference in the daily lives of our residents. Some of these projects are the Quay Street redevelopment, the Cedric Archer Park water play area, the pump track, the botanical gardens playground area and walking tracks, the fishing platforms, the SES shed in Gracemere, the numerous footpath programs—and the list goes on.

The total number of Gambling Community Benefit Fund grants issued to not-for-profit community organisations in the Rockhampton electorate from 2015 to July 2024 was 330, with a total dollar amount of \$8,298,464.88. That is a hell of a lot of sausage sizzles.

Looking ahead, I am pleased to see the commencement of some major projects that will continue to shape the future of our region. The \$1.8 billion Rockhampton Ring Road project will enhance connectivity and boost economic growth for years to come. I am particularly proud that 75 per cent of the workforce are Central Queensland locals. This project will take over 2,000 heavy vehicles a day out of town and significantly improve road safety. Importantly, a third bridge will ease congestion as Rockhampton continues to grow.

The nearly \$1 billion pipeline from the Fitzroy to Gladstone and the pipeline to Mount Morgan are critical infrastructure projects that will ensure water security and support massive regional development. I am pleased that tenders have been awarded for the new \$92 million, 32-bed mental health inpatient unit to be constructed at the Rockhampton Hospital. The commencement of stage 1 of the Browne Park redevelopment, the home of Rugby League in Rocky, will provide state-of-the-art facilities not only for Rugby League but also for the many other entertainment opportunities it will provide for our residents.

I would like to thank my electorate staff—Deb and Karen. When you are first elected there is so much to learn. They have made the job so much easier. They know every person in town, I swear. I would, of course, like to thank the Australian Labor Party branch members of Rockhampton and Central Queensland. Thank you so much for your support. I particularly thank my good friend Craig Marshall, who was my campaign manager and who is now the Labor candidate for Rockhampton.

I also want to thank the Premier, Steven Miles, and all of my parliamentary colleagues for their friendship and support over the past seven years. I particularly thank my Unity colleagues, Grace, Di, Leanne, Julieanne, my cousin Jess, Jonty, Curtis and James. You have no idea how much you mean to me. I truly thank you for the many laughs, your friendship and your support. We regularly caught up on a Thursday after parliament. It has always been something to look forward to at the end of the week.

Finally, I would like to thank the residents of Rockhampton and Gracemere for the honour of serving you. Thank you for the opportunities, the achievements and the great memories. It has been a journey of a lifetime, and I am forever thankful. I congratulate the other members who are retiring. I wish you all very best for future. Thank you.