




Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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ADJOURNMENT

Hearn, Master B

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (8.30 pm): Helen Keller said that a hearing impairment ‘means the loss of the most vital stimulus—the sound of the voice that brings language, sets thoughts astir and keeps us in the intellectual company of man’. Few would argue with one of the 20th century’s leading advocates for people with a disability, but the passage of time means that the most vital stimulus—the sound of the voice—is now available to more people than ever before, and it is not only the sound of voice. Last Friday I met with Burdekin local Billy Hearn, who is nine years old, and his mother, Marsha. We spoke about Billy’s dreams and experiences and about how much he enjoyed his teacher’s performance in the Burdekin Singers & Theatre Co.’s production of *The Little Mermaid*. It may sound like a normal day to most but, to Billy, it is the sound of success because at birth Billy was diagnosed with sensorineural hearing loss—a hearing impairment that makes it challenging to distinguish multiple sounds and voices—making a theatre production a challenge to say the least, but not in the Burdekin.

When Billy asked his mum to book tickets to the show he thought he would simply watch his teacher Olivia perform. He knew he would enjoy it but was conscious of the fact that he would most likely miss out on hearing her sing. Burdekin Singers enlisted the help of Burdekin theatre’s sound technician Dave Luscombe and, boy, was Billy in for a pleasant surprise. Dave put together a system to connect Billy’s cochlear sound processor with the theatre’s sound system and Billy was no longer just watching the show; he was immersed in the sounds of the production, including Olivia’s performance. It was an impressive achievement by both Dave and Billy’s teacher, Olivia, but when it comes to Billy impressive does not sound good enough.

Billy also participated in the REgional TArgeted INtervention or RETAIN program presented by Hear and Say with the assistance of the QCoal Foundation. The program assists children across Queensland, like Billy, to develop and maintain optimal listening, speech and language as well as assisting with social skills and access to the school curriculum. Part of the program saw Billy sharing his story at the second annual Power of Speech event in the Premier’s Hall here at Parliament House and in July he will represent Queensland in a public speaking event at Parliament House in Canberra.

Many people, including myself, would describe Billy as inspirational and, according to his mum, Billy has taught his family so much. He inspires those around him with his hard work. Billy’s focus, however, is on acknowledging the support he has received from the Burdekin community and his school, along with raising funds for Hear and Say to help other kids achieve their dreams and fulfil their potential. To both Billy and I that sounds like a great outcome. What a great kid Billy is. He has a great attitude and I have absolutely no doubt that he will achieve a lot in his lifetime.