




Speech By
David Lee

MEMBER FOR HERVEY BAY

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MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Mr LEE** (Hervey Bay—LNP) (5.42 pm): I am honoured and humbled to deliver my inaugural speech as the newly elected state member for Hervey Bay. I thank the Hervey Bay electors for placing their confidence and trust in me. I take this responsibility seriously and will strive to give dignified and accountable service in the best interests of the Hervey Bay community. Earlier this week, I was sworn in as the state member for Hervey Bay. I swore to discharge my duty as a state member of parliament faithfully and to the best of my ability. I regard my sworn oath as an enforceable contract with the people of Hervey Bay and I am committed to delivering on the terms of that contract over the next four years.

It may surprise many in this House to know that I was a disengaged youth and a regular school truant who did not complete secondary school. However, I had one strength: my love for talking to older people. It was that connection that led me to working in aged care. Soon after, I commenced my nursing career as a 19-year-old at the Queen Memorial Infectious Diseases Hospital in Melbourne. As I worked towards getting my first nursing qualification, I worked on the polio ward with many survivors of the 1950s polio epidemic. It was here that I heard the story of Max, an inspirational man who had lived with polio in an iron lung. An iron lung was a mechanical respirator that enabled Max to breathe after the disease had destroyed his physical body. Undeterred by his health conditions, Max started a small business whilst living in that iron lung. He sold Levi jeans to the doctors, nurses and orderlies, and started a successful real estate investment business. When he eventually passed away, Max was a very wealthy man. Max was one of the many people who lived courageously with polio in the hospital. His and other polio patients' attitudes towards living their best lives was amazing and had a profound impact on my life.

From there I joined the Salvation Army. Valuable experiences of working with people who were homeless, the mentally ill, alcoholics, the terminally ill and people from all walks of life helped me to develop a compassion and drive for working with people. I later provided critical incident stress debriefing services to the Victoria State Emergency Service dealing with road trauma on the Hume Highway near Albury-Wodonga. Years of service as an Australian Army medic and operating theatre specialist, tertiary studies in nursing and law and master's degrees in both commerce and law—applied law—later equipped me in holding chief executive officer roles in hospitals, aged care and community healthcare services in Victoria. Not bad for a disengaged youth!

It was because of significant and inspirational people who came into my life that I began to understand the benefits of hard work and grit. I studied part-time for over 20 years whilst holding demanding chief executive officer roles. An unknown author once said, 'The harder I work, the luckier I get.' I like to reframe that quote and say the harder I work, the more opportunities that come my way. I have worked hard, studied hard and taken every opportunity to use my skills and experiences in the positions I have held. Yes, there has been some luck, but mostly a steely determination to always succeed in doing my job well. Essentially, I am a people person. I love meeting and advocating for people, drawing from my work and life experiences.

After holidaying in Hervey Bay for over 30 years, I finally moved there eight years ago. I took the opportunity to run for Fraser Coast Regional Council. Whilst on council, I served on council's Water and Waste Management Committee. This committee provided priceless insights into the importance of water security and a regional waste management strategy including, but not limited to, sound landfill management and recycling. A collaborative and respectful relationship with Fraser Coast Regional Council has been cultivated over time and will be immeasurably beneficial in my role as the state member for Hervey Bay.

I have continued to make the most of opportunities to work alongside and advocate for people in our community. I can truly say I love living in Hervey Bay. I love engaging and contributing to my community, whether it is through Rotary, chairing the Salvation Army Red Shield Appeal, Men's Walk and Talk luncheons, a period of time as a board director of Bayside Christian College, Fraser Community Meals on Wheels, Fraser Coast Hospice, shaving my head to fundraise for the Leukaemia Foundation, joining others in feeding the homeless, cheering on the Humpbacks All Abilities Futsal Club, participating in the Christian faith community or visiting the local Torquay Beachside Markets. Hervey Bay is my home and passion. I truly understand the reasons why people are moving to Hervey Bay. The desire for a slower, relaxed lifestyle that might include walking on the beach and enjoying a cup of coffee in one of the many cafes is an attractive choice for many people. An outdoor lifestyle is readily available to all.

Prior to European settlement, the region of Hervey Bay and surrounds were inhabited by the Butchulla people to the east and the Gubbi Gubbi people to the west. The names of several suburbs in Hervey Bay are derived from Aboriginal expressions such as Urraween, meaning 'a place of emus', and Kawungan, meaning 'a place of magpies'. Today I want to commend the Butchulla community for the great work they do in our community, including the Kal'ang Respite Centre.

Hervey Bay, initially Hervey's Bay, was named by Lieutenant James Cook of Her Majesty's *Endeavour*, in honour of Captain Augustus John Hervey, a naval officer and Lord of the Admiralty. European settlement in the region began in the 1850s, and the first European, Boyle Martin, settled in Hervey Bay in 1863. Hervey Bay was named a town in 1959 and proclaimed a city in 1984. We have a detailed and meticulously recorded history of Hervey Bay due to the dedication of the volunteers at the Hervey Bay Historical Village & Museum. Today I acknowledge the efforts of John Anderson, Greg Jacobson and Brian Taylor, who have had oversight of the museum volunteers and have preserved our Hervey Bay historical story. In fact, I was honoured, as a Fraser Coast regional councillor, to unveil the 50-year 1974 to 2024 commemorative plaque in March of this year.

The state electorate of Hervey Bay has a long political pedigree, dating back to the first parliament in 1860. Our state electorates have been variously identified as Wide Bay, Maryborough, Burrum and Isis. Indeed, one of our former state members, the member for Isis, includes the 29th premier of Queensland, the late Jack Pizzey.

We are truly blessed to have an amazing and beautiful island at our front door—an ecotourism paradise. In 1992, K'gari Fraser Island was World Heritage listed and in 2007 added to the National Heritage List in recognition of its heritage significance under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. K'gari Fraser Island is also connected with the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and is a part of the Great Sandy Biosphere Reserve. A Ramsar convention is an international treaty that aims to preserve wetlands and their resources through wise use and management.

Hervey Bay is also world renowned as an iconic location for whale watching. Whale watching commenced in 1987 with one charter boat and now contributes significantly to our tourism industry. In 2019, the Fraser Coast was accredited as the world's first Whale Heritage site and officially crowned as the 'whale watch capital of the world'. Our Whale Heritage accreditation is recognition of the region's commitment to responsible and sustainable whale and dolphin watching. Each year the southern humpback whales take the stopover route between K'gari Fraser Island and the mainland in mid-July to early November. This is their southern migration to the cooler waters of Antarctic. It is one of the few places in the world used as a whale nursery, where multiple mothers and calves play together.

Hervey Bay also has a thriving energetic and diverse multicultural community. This includes the Filipino Australian Association Fraser Coast and the Island Breeze Rugby Plus, an association of Fijian and South Pacific Islanders promoting Rugby Sevens in our community.

As a former Australian Army soldier it is my privilege to support our veterans community. We have a large veterans community supported by some outstanding advocates. Many of our veterans are doing it tough, and I pay tribute to their service. I acknowledge the efforts of the Hervey Bay RSL Sub-Branch, the Veterans of Australia Association and Legacy in supporting our veterans. Each year in Hervey Bay I am encouraged to see thousands, including many of our young people, attending the Anzac Day and Remembrance Day services. Lest we forget.

Many are familiar with the heroic deeds of our soldiers in the battle of Long Tan. Delta Company 6RAR came under attack from the North Vietnamese Army. The Delta Company men were outnumbered 10 to one in a fierce battle that endured for four hours. The late Corporal Henry 'Buddy' Lea was a Delta Company platoon section commander. Buddy, a former Hervey Bay resident, was an Indigenous soldier who courageously rescued a fellow soldier whilst under enemy fire. Buddy was shot a number of times and yet survived the ordeal. Buddy later said, 'You put your own life on the line to save your mates.' On Vietnam Veterans' Day I was privileged to present a framed photograph of Buddy and his former OC of Delta Company 6RAR, the late Lieutenant-Colonel Harry Smith, to Buddy's wife and daughter.

It should come as no surprise that Hervey Bay, including the Fraser Coast region, is a must-see tourist destination. In the 2024 financial year, tourism in the Fraser Coast region contributed an estimated \$877 million to the Fraser Coast regional economy and supported about 7,900 jobs. That is 18.1 per cent of employment in the Fraser Coast region.

There are over 3,000 businesses in Hervey Bay, and it would be remiss of me not to mention our hardworking small business community. Small business is the backbone of our local, regional and state economy. My parents were small business owners and I understand that the work does not stop when the shopfront closes. I look forward to continuing to engage, value and encourage our small business community.

Hervey Bay has an interesting and challenging demographic. The median age of a Hervey Bay resident is 52, against a Queensland median age of 38. Thirty-two per cent of our population is aged 65 years and older, so it is no surprise that health and social assistance is 23.9 per cent of our total workforce. However, it is a misapprehension to mischaracterise Hervey Bay simply as an aging population. Currently there are at least 9,000 enrolled Hervey Bay public and private school primary and secondary students. We have come a long way since the first Pialba public school opened in 1884, followed by a private school in 1888. Our population has an average growth rate of 2.1 per cent over the last 10 years and Hervey Bay is the fastest growing population on the Fraser Coast. Sadly, according to 2021 ABS data, the Fraser Coast region has some of the highest chronic disease rates as a percentage of the total Fraser Coast population across all of the disease indicators.

I thank the people of Hervey Bay for the opportunity to represent them—for the opportunity to articulate and advocate their collective concerns in this House, for the opportunity to advocate for a bold and inspiring Hervey Bay vision for the next 25 years and beyond. I am humbled by the honour and privilege and accept the responsibility that comes with the power and authority of state member incumbency. State member incumbency is an opportunity not to be squandered. In a famous line from the Australian movie classic *The Castle*, the incompetent lawyer, Dennis Denuto, flounders to find the legal authority to support his client's case. In desperation he states, 'It's just the vibe of the thing.' Whilst the 'vibe of the thing' has no authority in law, there is a vibe—a distinctive feeling or quality—that can be sensed when we are comprehensively engaged in our local community. My mantra during my council incumbency and subsequent state campaign was to be visible, vocal and active in our community. The 'vibe of the thing' is that community sentiment about a particular issue or concern; however, that community sentiment requires a level of discernment that can only come from strong and consistent whole-of-community engagement. The vibe has to be verified as being in the best interests of the community as a whole.

I greatly value the importance of legacy. An 18th century lawyer and philosopher, Edmund Burke, once said that society is a contract between those who are living, those who are deceased and those who are yet to be born.

I am committed to Burke's conception of society because I, as the state member for Hervey Bay, want to leave an enduring legacy to the yet-to-be-born Hervey Bay community—our future. That is why I put myself forward as a candidate at the recent state election.

A well-crafted, bold, inspiring long-term vision for Hervey Bay is absolutely integral to our future economic, social, physical and mental wellbeing. However, a vision has to find expression in a sound implementation plan—a plan that is time bound, with KPIs. Hervey Bay is experiencing rapid and significant population growth which is building to a crescendo. It is critical that we develop, as a matter of urgency, a well-considered and fit-for-purpose infrastructure and service plan. I will assiduously pursue on behalf of the Hervey Bay community projects such as a review of the Wide Bay Burnett Regional Plan, health and education precinct plans, a boat harbour master plan, a new Hervey Bay police station and fire and rescue stations and an integrated Fraser Coast transport strategy. I will also assiduously work towards night lights for the AFL Bombers ground, upgrades to the change rooms at the Hervey Bay hockey club, a heat-sealing machine for Fraser Coast Community Meals on Wheels and building upgrades for the Bayside Transformations group, which does fantastic work in our community with drug and alcohol rehabilitation.

Before I conclude, I need to express my profound gratitude for the energetic support of my family and campaign team. My mother, Maureen, and my wife, Jillian, are two of the most resilient women I have ever met. My mother grew up in public housing and experienced hardship in early life. Mum was compelled to leave school in grade 6 and always wanted to be a nurse. In her mid-30s, she studied hard whilst raising a family and finally realised her dream of becoming a nurse and was awarded a graduate prize for her efforts. Mum, you are an inspiration. I would not be here today but for the support and the love of my life, Jillian. This year we celebrated 40 years of marriage. Jillian has been my true friend and soulmate through many challenges for most of my life. We have two sons, two wonderful daughters-in-law and six grandchildren with a seventh due early next year.

No successful election campaign is complete without a campaign manager. I was truly blessed to have a dedicated, hardworking, very experienced and politically astute campaigner in Paula Harberger. Jade Wellings, a former councillor colleague and a friend, provided amazing social media, media and practical support and advice. I also convey my heartfelt thanks to the Christian faith community, who supported me in prayer throughout the entire campaign and continue to do so.

Our campaign team was ably supported by Steve Coleman, SEC chair, and Greg McHugh, SEC treasurer. I also acknowledge Ted Sorensen, the former state member for Hervey Bay, a member of this House for 11 years and a good friend. Ted is an outstanding grassroots politician and a regular conveyer of 'who sold the assets'. Ted is well known and respected in our community and served for 11 years in this House. I also express my profound appreciation to Premier David Crisafulli and the member for Chatsworth, Hon. Steve Minnikin, for their inspirational leadership, encouragement, advice and support over the last 12 months.

Last but by no means least, I am perpetually grateful for the incredible support of our team of volunteers who spent countless hours in all weather conditions handing out how-to-vote cards, delivering leaflets, engaging in community chats, manning market and shop stands and putting up yard signs. I would not be in this House today but for their collective sacrificial efforts. I commend my inaugural speech to the House.