



Speech By  
**Hon. Michael Healy**


**MEMBER FOR CAIRNS**

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Record of Proceedings, 7 March 2024

**PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT**

**Maunder, Ms S**

 **Hon. MP HEALY** (Cairns—ALP) (Minister for Tourism and Sport) (2.34 pm): It gives me great pleasure to add my voice to the chorus of congratulations on the much deserved recognition that Suellen Maunder, founding director of JUTE Theatre in Cairns, received last week from her peers by being named the recipient of the Gold Matilda Award for services to regional theatre in Queensland for over 30 years. The Matilda Awards, which were founded in 1987 to celebrate and promote the excellence of Queensland's theatre industry, is supported by Arts Queensland and Brisbane City Council. The Gold Matilda is a special open award in recognition of an individual, a company or a group for their contribution to the industry as determined by a judging panel—I believe quite an arduous process.

The Just Us Theatre Ensemble, which is what JUTE stands for—I did not know that until the other day—was founded in late 1992 by three passionate Cairns-based theatre professionals: Suellen Maunder, Kathryn Ash and Susan Prince. All of them are extremely passionate. It was their shared vision to create a professional theatre company that was able to create stories from the region. From humble beginnings, the JUTE Theatre Company, through hard work, determination, tenacity and persistence, has grown into the dynamic, award-winning and nationally regarded 'new work' theatre company that is consistently challenging the boundaries of exploration in theatre practice. What makes JUTE successful is that their story is grounded in reality, unlike some in the chamber, and they are equipped to continually change and evolve with the current world landscape.

From its base in Cairns, JUTE is uniquely placed to champion regional artists and create new audiences. With over three decades of experience, JUTE is the vessel in which new stories and perspectives are forged that inspire and educate our communities in the Far North through powerful shared theatre experiences. JUTE gives permission to regional voices to examine the marginal, the unexplored and the unforeseen to create stories that impact us and, more importantly, change our world.

Suellen is not only the artistic director and CEO of JUTE but also a director and actor. She has served on the Theatre Board of the Australia Council for the Arts Queensland Sector Plan Reference Group along with being a trustee on the board of the Queensland Performing Arts Trust. Suellen continues to serve on a range of boards and funding assessment panels, along with being committed to the growth of exceptional professional theatre in the regions.

In Suellen's own words, she attended an event where she met a young girl called Gina, who shared with her how meeting with JUTE had impacted and changed her life through the power of theatre. I want to thank Suellen on behalf of my community for her commitment and hard work now and into the future. We support all that she does.

*(Time expired)*