




Speech By
Nigel Dalton

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

Record of Proceedings, 28 November 2024

MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Mr DALTON** (Mackay—LNP) (1.30 pm): I rise to second the motion moved by the member for Thuringowa for the address-in-reply to the opening speech by Her Excellency. Mr Deputy Speaker Lister, congratulations on your appointment.

It is with humility and honour that I stand before you today. This marks the 58th occasion since 1860 that members have gathered to begin a new term of service to those who have elected them to the Queensland parliament, but it is the first time that a member of the Liberal National Party stands in this House representing the people of Mackay. I am truly privileged to be that elected person.

I want to thank my opponents in the recent election campaign, particularly Ms Belinda Hassan, for a fair and respectful contest. I have known Ms Hassan for many years. She has represented the people of Mackay on council for several years and is passionate about making Mackay a better place for all. I wish her all the best with the recovery from her ACL injury.

I have made Mackay my home since 2003, when my family migrated from the UK to be with my widowed mother-in-law who, at that time, was a resident of the Whitsunday electorate. My wife, Sue, my daughter, Alice, and my son, Angus, set up home in Mackay after I was posted to the Mackay police station on general duties following my police abridged competency education course at the Oxley academy. My family soon started getting involved in community activities in the Mackay area while enjoying the beauty and accessibility of the area, from beaches and tropical rainforests to outstanding sporting, cultural and arts facilities. At this point I extend my thanks to the present Mackay Mayor, Greg Williamson, and the Mackay Regional Council, past and present, for their continued efforts to make Mackay the best region in Queensland to live.

From my accent you will have guessed already that I am not Australian through descent so it is probably time to describe my journey to Queensland. I was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland. I am the youngest of four. Our family was known as the AMEN chorus: Alan, Margaret, Elizabeth, and I completed the acronym with an N. At the time I was born, my father was a university lecturer at Queen's University Belfast. Prior to arriving in Northern Ireland my family had been living in Freetown, Sierra Leone, West Africa. My father had been a university lecturer in Fourah Bay College for nine years and the family moved to Northern Ireland just before I was born.

At the time I was born, the troubles that engulfed the community of Northern Ireland over the next 30 years had not started and it was a peaceful and stunning area of the United Kingdom. In the 1960s, Northern Ireland had lots of small farms, livestock, sheep, beef, dairy cattle and pigs. Crops included oats, barley, potatoes and hay for winter feed. One of the most famous industrial icons was the Harland & Wolff cranes, *Samson* and *Goliath*, located in the shipyard where the *Titanic* was constructed in the early part of the 20th century.

My primary school days started in Northern Ireland but, when my father was appointed temporary professor of education at the University of Zambia, I went to school in Lusaka for nearly three years. That brief period in Africa had a profound effect on my life. Visiting leprosy missions, game parks and Victoria Falls certainly allowed me to broaden my mind and horizons from just the Emerald Isle.

When we returned from Zambia to Northern Ireland it was a very different place. Bombings, bomb scares, roadblocks, riots, sectarian shootings and general hatred and distrust of others had erupted and became part of everyday life. Northern Ireland was completely divided, with little or no contact with the other side. Thankfully, our parents steered us away from the sectarianism as much as possible and tried to keep us on the level. Holidays were often taken on the mainland, away from the troubles, but the politics of the troubles were never far from anybody's mind.

Our parents were Christians and we attended a small Methodist church. Sundays were Sunday school, Bible class with the crusaders and that was it. My values have been nurtured from those activities along with Scripture Union, summer camps and house parties at Easter. My parents were never too far from helping the less fortunate and lonely.

One particular area of concern for my parents was the loneliness of overseas students who were away from home countries and families during the long university holidays. My parents would regularly pack our kombivan with overseas students from all over the world and take them on road trips around Northern Ireland for walks in forest parks, to waterfalls or along cliffs and mountain ranges. For me, this meant an introduction to world politics, religion and geography. We shared many meals with our United Nations family at home on Sundays and at Christmas. That just became the norm. My mother started running a casual English language group for the partners of the overseas students, many of whom felt isolated in Belfast. The many examples of service that my parents gave all four of us is fundamental to the way we are today and I will be forever thankful for their Christian parenting.

I was the youngest and my brother and sisters had moved from home well before I left school. My mother and father started attending Fitzroy Presbyterian Church, which had a focus on cross-denominational connections. This activity was very much against the norm as most Protestants would not engage in dialogue with Catholics and vice versa. This focus was led by the Reverend Ken Newell and the late Father Gerry Reynolds, who were two of the quiet peacemakers in Northern Ireland. This focus group provided an extremely important learning opportunity and was an important part of my later police life.

My senior school days were spent at an all-boys grammar school in south Belfast. During my years at school I started to swim competitively and a lot of my waking hours were taken up with early morning and evening sessions. Backstroke was my best stroke and my best result was winning the Irish schools 100-metre shortcourse race for my age group when I was 17 years old.

Upon leaving school I went to a technical college for two years and studied electronics but soon realised that electronics was not for me. Having friends who had joined the Royal Ulster Constabulary, I decided to apply for and was accepted into the training centre at Enniskillen in County Fermanagh. Policing in Northern Ireland was nothing normal. Policing a deeply divided community was at best tough and at worst horrendous. Some of the situations I was involved in I would not wish on anyone. As a member of the security forces, one was seen as a legitimate target not only while on duty; one was also a target off duty. Security was continually on one's mind. Checking underneath one's car before driving off, varying one's route on regular journeys and sitting with one's back to the wall in a cafe or restaurant all became second nature. My seat in parliament makes me feel very comfortable.

With the constant threat of terrorist attacks off duty, many police took their holidays overseas or at least on the UK mainland. I started enjoying snow skiing, so off to the Alps I would go every winter for my holidays. On one of those trips I met a final-year dental student, Sue. Sue and I were married about a year later. We started our married life in a rural area 15 miles from Belfast. We soon made the decision to move to another police service within the UK and I was accepted into the Dorset police force early in 1990. We set up home in a rural village near the Jurassic Coast. My wife became the village dentist and I started policing in an urban area around Poole Harbour. I think it was here where I actually learned how to police properly. Gone were the days when I had backup from 10 to 15 police or military. Now was the time to negotiate with a person of interest so one could deal with the situation safely.

Dorset is one of the most untouched areas of England, with plenty of good folk living around the charming villages. Farming and small businesses were common and, as our family grew, we got involved in many community groups and church groups. Swimming was still an interest of mine within the police and with Masters swimming.

Now to the connection with Australia and Queensland. Let's take you back. Sue's father, Lindsay Cunningham, was born in Bundaberg and went to school there. Lindsay's family originated in Scotland. Lindsay's grandfather had emigrated to Australia in the 1880s and was one of the original directors of

the Isis sugar mill. Once Lindsay had finished school, he went to work for Evans Deakin at Kangaroo Point here in Brisbane. Later, he transferred to Shell Oil, which took him to their office in London. This is where he met his Scottish wife, Margaret, who had been working in Venezuela, South America also for Shell Oil.

They married and Sue was their second child. They lived in Surrey in England but had a three-year spell in Japan, returning to Surrey where both their children finished their schooling and were accepted into universities in England. During Sue's final year at dental college, she happened to book a skiing holiday with the same group travelling to the French Alps where I was and we fell in love. Sadly, Lindsay, my father-in-law, died suddenly in 1990, leaving Margaret by herself in the Whitsundays. During the nineties, we visited Queensland from the UK for holidays and family visits. We enjoyed the country, the people, the culture and the climate and then realised Queensland was calling.

I applied for a transfer as a retread and was accepted into the Queensland Police Service in 2002. Once I completed my training at Oxley, we moved to Mackay in early 2003. When we moved to Mackay, we were quickly surrounded by wonderful people, some of whom had been part of Mackay forever and others who were new to Mackay, like us. All were extremely welcoming and happy to assist with those adjustments that any new resident has in a new country.

The first years of policing in Mackay were when I got used to the Queensland legislation, the procedures of the Queensland Police Service and the community of Mackay. I relied on the domestic violence legislation as many instances I attended were DV related. I saw firsthand the anguish of victims of domestic violence and the knock-on effect of the violence on the children within that relationship. I quickly realised that the domestic violence liaison officer was pivotal in monitoring the police district's work in this area. From supporting victims at court to checking all had been done to refer the broken family to external agencies, I knew this was an area in which I could assist the local community.

In 2006, a position in the Crime Prevention Unit became available and I saw an opportunity to work with all victims of crime, including those in domestic violence, in the crime prevention space. In my new role as officer in charge of crime prevention, I soon realised that the community of Mackay really appreciated the police getting involved with them. I, therefore, made it a priority to be involved in schools and community groups as much as possible.

One long-term connection with the community was through the Queensland Police's Adopt-a-Cop program, and I held this position at Mackay Christian College from 2004 until I age-retired earlier this year. Amazingly, last Thursday I welcomed an ex-student of Mackay Christian College, along with others, into the Mackay police district as a first-year constable. I again wish Constable Michael Rutland, who was a student at MCC until 2012, and his first-year cohort all the best in the service and I encourage Michael to get involved in the Mackay Christian College's Adopt-a-Cop program.

Through crime prevention projects, I got involved with the Central Queensland University's Conservatorium of Music using applied theatre to educate young people about being safer and preventing crime in multiple environments at different stages of their lives. Choices was one of these projects which assisted young people about to embark on their final year to make better choices. This was led by Professor Judith Brown and other lecturers from the conservatorium but performed by students studying in the university. This peer-to-peer crime prevention education has been analysed and it was proved to change people's behaviour in relation to illegal drugs, particularly at schoolies celebrations in Airlie Beach. The Choices project enhanced the safety response of the schoolies in Airlie Beach because many of the school leavers had had a relationship with police in their school from their Choices school performances.

Another project that was created by Judith Brown and Miss Hannah Barn was called Safety Circus. This project was aimed at the younger end of primary school, focusing on non-motorised transport safety protective behaviours and what a bystander could do to support someone being bullied. This project is supported by the Daniel Morcombe Foundation and Mackay Regional Council. Both Choices and Safety Circus have been performed to over 50,000 students since their creation in the Mackay area. These two projects allow students to interact with police in their own school while learning very important safety messages appropriate to their age group.

Other notable intervention projects that I have had the pleasure of supporting are the You Choose program with Peter and Melissa McGuinness; the Matthew Stanley Foundation, a youth violence prevention foundation, with the late Paul Stanley; Digital Cocaine and Digital Rehab, on internet addiction, with Brad Huddlestone; Eyes Open, on social media training, with Tricia Munn; Tumble Turn, domestic violence education for schools and communities, with Chloe McCardel—Chloe is a world record holder for swimming the English Channel 44 times but has also had to live through DFV—and Safer Living with Vicki Blackburn.

I want to actually highlight Vicki Blackburn for a moment. Thank you for your support through the years and through my election campaign. We still want to see justice for Shandee. Shandee was her daughter who was brutally murdered in February 2013 and we will continue to support her as the DNA laboratory scandal is corrected.

Other organisations in the Mackay community called for police information sessions about safer living, drugs education, road safety, through a Fatal Five talk, sexual behaviours, consent education and scam awareness. In the Crime Prevention Unit, we try to make ourselves available to all groups wanting presentations.

Some anti-violence projects that I created included Assault Free Zone, which won a bronze award in the 2019 Australian Crime and Violence Prevention Awards of the Australian Institute of Criminology, and the Anger Rage Regret project. Both of these were well received in the community and continue to be used with various groups at various locations. I now leave all these projects and connections to the officer who has been promoted to my role as the officer in charge of crime prevention, Sergeant Steve Smith. Steve and I have worked alongside each other for 10 years and he is completely suitable for this demanding position in Mackay.

Mackay is tremendously supported by many community organisations. They are the glue that holds our community together. Those organisations include: Chances House, street chaplains, school chaplaincy, school P&Cs, Neighbourhood Watch Queensland, SES cadets, PCYC, Churches Together, Mackay Musical Comedy Players, Choral Society, Kucom Theatre group, Conservatorium Friends, Mackay Hospital Foundation, Shed Happens, the RSL, Project Booyah and Rotary, to name but a few. Along with all the sporting organisations in Mackay, they really do work well together. All these organisations are supported by a massive team of volunteers and I want to thank each one of them for the time and organisational skills they put into making their organisation work.

As you can tell by now, the Mackay community mean a lot to me. Not only have they supported me through 22 years of policing; they have supported me through an election campaign. It would not surprise you that my focus in this term of government is to support the community of Mackay, to help them recover from the youth crime crisis, the health crisis and the cost-of-living crisis. We need to hold offenders to account and have consequences for their actions. We need to support victims of crime, help the homeless with affordable housing and drive down the cost of living. Early intervention is critical to prevent another generation of young people falling off the rails.

The Queensland Police Service's motto is displayed on every uniformed officer's sleeve—'With honour we serve'. I will feel extremely privileged to continue to serve the community of Mackay again, and I would like to adapt the Queensland police's motto for my next season and this term representing the community of Mackay—'With honour I will continue to serve'.

None of my achievements or service has been by chance. I feel every experience, every opportunity, every moment of learning has been gifted to me, and I want to give God, my heavenly Father, the glory. As I draw to a close, I would like to quote words from St Francis of Assisi as I launch into my new role as the member for Mackay. St Francis said—

Preach the gospel at all times and, when necessary, use words.

To God be the glory, great things he has done. Amen.