



Speech By  
**Sean Dillon**

**MEMBER FOR GREGORY**

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Record of Proceedings, 10 December 2024

### MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Mr DILLON** (Gregory—LNP) (3.41 pm): Today I rise to speak for the first time in this place, humbled and grateful for the opportunity afforded to me by the people of Gregory to represent them in the 58th Parliament. I congratulate you, Mr Deputy Speaker Kempton, on your return to this place and on the office and role that you now fill. I ask that you convey my gratitude and congratulations to the member for Condamine on his election to the high office of Speaker.

A little over a week ago, I came to this place late at night when the chamber was empty. Peace and serenity abounded. The silence lay heavy—even deafening—yet the symbolism and poignancy of a room steeped in history still shone through. What struck me then, even more so than now as I utter my first official words in this hallowed place, was the awesomeness and responsibility that comes with the honour of being elected to serve Queenslanders in this place.

Of course, being here is not a birthright. Effort, listening and loyalty along with a dedicated support crew are integral. My first and most immediate thanks need to be extended to my wife, Sarah, and to Ryan, Tia and Kacee, the most loveable rascal children we could have been blessed with. They are a strong and tough yet loving team. While I am off around the traps, Sarah has to shoulder the burden of day-to-day family life as well as run our cattle station alongside my mother, Elsie. Terrifically competent and capable young adults in Ryan and Tia now arise, ready to make their own mark in agriculture and in life. Our baby, Kacee, is embarking on her new journey as the recently elected 2025 Emerald campus school captain for Capricornia School of Distance Education. Whilst we share common interests and values, I could not be more humbled by any other group or responsibility than to receive the endorsement and opportunity you have afforded me in pursuing this. Thanks for being a leveller and a promoter, for keeping me grounded and for ensuring there are not any free rides.

To my dear mother, Elsie: this special time comes with such honour yet huge sadness as a great man who is no longer with us has left a huge hole in both of our lives. Whilst he would have been amongst the proudest bushmen in Queensland today, I would give it all away to have him back. Thanks, Mum and thanks, Dad. To my sister, Teneille, and family: thanks for being the enablers along the way. Together we have shared some bumpy roads, but the support of your family in pursuit of this opportunity has been rock solid. To my family's official political commentator and self-appointed minister for everything, Mick: I appreciate all you did for me in the years since the passing of my dad. You continue to provide advice and support to this very day in not only politics but also life in general.

My immediate predecessors in this role have ensured I have a tough act to follow. I am the 12th elected member for Gregory and the fifth consecutive National or Liberal National representative. They are men whose passion for the people and places in Gregory is real and obvious. They are men of tremendous loyalty and honour. To the late Vaughan Johnson and the recently retired Lachlan Millar: thank you for your service and exemplar. I will strive every day to work and continue your support for the greater electorate of Gregory.

As leaders of our party, the members for Broadwater and Kawana, the Premier and Deputy Premier, demonstrated the patience, discipline and foresight that not only convinced Queenslanders to support them and the LNP but also attracted those who are new to this place. I congratulate the Premier and wish him every success as the government sets about implementing the reforms and changes outlined during the past four years and for which we received a strong mandate on 26 October.

No campaign matters without a strong leader and mine was no different. Sonia Burton was and is a terrific stalwart, astute administrator and uber organised SEC chair. The remainder of the campaign team provided terrific support and advice. To Lane, Ross, Lenore, Joe, John, Katrina and Jacquetta, amongst so many volunteers: words cannot express my gratitude but, put simply, thank you. To Ben, Michael, Steve, Nathan and the team within the LNP administration: special thanks for your professionalism and ability in facilitating my campaign in a manner that reflected not only the values of the party but also the needs of people in regional and remote Queensland. I thank the grandfather of our political movement, the ever-honourable Lawrence Springborg. The government's result is due in no small part to his calming influence and support.

I need also to extend my gratitude to those party members who have been a consistent and clear support for me during my time in various volunteer roles. To Cam, Andrew and David: thank you. I thank the Queensland Senate team and my local members for reminding Australians that remote and regional Queensland does exist. To David, Susan, Matt, James and Colin: thanks for the assistance. To my close mates—you know who you are: thanks for your friendship and support on this journey. I am sure you will not be strangers and the advice will flow constantly.

I guess that leads me to the crux of what this dialogue is all about. Some here, others outside and perhaps someone in the future may want to understand what drove me to want to be a member of parliament. I am a beef, sheep and wool grower's son. I am a relatively uneducated—at least in the formal tertiary sense—former mayor and now a state parliamentarian. Let me tell you, here, now and forevermore, that, despite contrary opinions, it was a tough call. With a successful grazing business, a loving family and 23 years experience in elected roles across industry, politics and sporting bodies, the case to leave it to others was pretty compelling. My perspective and the approach that I bring to this place have been forged through old-school values and life experience.

I was educated in the bush. I did primary school through the Longreach School of Distance Education and secondary school at Mount Carmel College and Columba Catholic College at Charters Towers. I was fortunate to have several very positive role models throughout my education. I would like to acknowledge the exceptional abilities and efforts of Gillian Haslam, Susan Buchanan, Althea Norton, Ian Dietrich and Andrew Butler. To me, you were titans amongst giants in the education system. To this day I recall your guidance with clarity and I feel privileged to have learned from you.

My parents set a sterling example of community engagement that I am proud to continue, with massive contributions of time, money and equipment—things they often had in short supply—to the local show, race committee, rodeos and campdrafts. The decades of experience this has given me since with the work of voluntary committees has provided a clear view of the needs of community groups and the massively important role they play in Queensland's, especially regional Queensland's, social and economic fabric.

Coupled with this is the critical role events are playing in helping combat the scourge of mental health disease, never more obvious than in regional settings. The ability to share experiences, or not, or to discuss the football or cricket are all things that social outings provide as an important step and tool in identifying and helping people through tough times. These events are run almost exclusively in rural and remote areas by volunteers and not-for-profits.

As an example, I have been tremendously impressed with the Alpha community's ability to field senior rugby league sides, both male and female, in recent years. My home town of Alpha is a very small community of only around 450 people. As the Rugby League Club president, I have witnessed firsthand the transformation of young men and women and the massive changes in both community and individual emotional and physical wellbeing. I do admit, though, at times my refereeing of fixtures whilst being the club president has been somewhat taxing on my emotional wellbeing!

One of the significant bodies that has shaped the way I approach public life has been the Australian Campdraft Association. Formed to provide guidance, rules and recognition for the uniquely Australian sport of campdraft, the ACA has been the pre-eminent body here in Queensland since 1972. I have had the honour of serving on the management committee since 2000 and as either the president or vice-president from 2008 until today, but I have now tendered my resignation. Representing the sport to government on matters ranging from the introduction of the National Livestock Identification System

to full cost recovery ambulance services, along with ensuring common sense could sometimes prevail in interpretations, has provided me with an insight into the workings of government as well as the pitfalls of bad policy or bad advocacy.

Local government was the first, I guess, official level of public service. Having served on a local advisory committee to the Barcaldine Regional Council post the disastrous council amalgamations of 2008, I viewed my election to the role as a councillor in 2016 as a huge honour and one that continued in my father's and grandfather's footsteps of serving and representing my community, with both men serving for long periods of time on the Jericho Shire Council, one of the predecessors to the Barcaldine council. However, unlike them, I served at a time when councillors were being asked to fulfil a different role, one with infinitely more public scrutiny and expectation yet considerably less power or ability to effect change.

Not one to simply just collect the considerable pay cheque and go around again, I formed the opinion late in my first term as a councillor that I would have to stand for the mayoralty, content that, even if I lost, I would be satisfied that I offered an alternative approach. I stood on policy and process, not personality. After a clean and open election, I was fortunate to emerge with the job and enjoyed four challenging years as mayor, working with many current and former members of this place to deliver a better outcome for the Barcaldine region.

I was so fortunate to have also been exposed to many other excellent community leaders around the state from all walks of life at this time. The patience, politeness and respect that is required to lead and to serve and to be an honest broker, even in situations which give rise to parochial requests, is displayed every single day throughout the local government sector. To those people who continue to serve in these roles, know that you will always receive a hearing from me. Government at all levels is not something where everyone gets what they want all the time but, with genuine inclusion and collaboration, generally the community wins.

Outside of politics and community groups, I have been involved at all levels of agricultural production and surrounded by some of the biggest and best quality coalmines in Australia. This is where the biggest shaping of my personal political beliefs began and continues. Gregory is home to some of Australia's best natural and improved grazing land. Secure water supply, albeit in places with varying degrees of rainfall reliability or annual totals, further enhances agricultural productivity. The eastern part of the electorate produces dryland and irrigated broadacre crops, along with citrus, viticulture and macadamia nuts. The Fairbairn Dam, when completed, ensured that our region could boost massively and sustainably its contribution to GDP and provide for huge employment opportunities for generations to come. Water is an area that this government has identified as requiring substantial focus moving forward for both security and economic growth, and I look forward to assisting in this regard.

Coal in Central Queensland was, and certainly in my mind at least still is, a jewel in the crown, opening up not only our region but also the whole state and, indeed, the nation to economic investment. The world's highest quality coking coal provides the material for the production of steel for everything from high-rise buildings to footpaths, from cattle yards to rail lines. Funding the construction of entire communities and the essential assets in many others, expanding the population in the regions and, with it, essential infrastructure, resource companies have literally built and sustained parts of Queensland yet those sectors—mining and agriculture—have come under sustained pressure. No, they have come under sustained threat. I am here today as a strong and fierce advocate for both industries. The demonisation from certain quarters, based on ideology and from a position of detached involvement, was and is driving these industries to the brink of extinction. Perspectives across the spectrum all deserve an opportunity to be heard but the future of these industries has been called into question from people with no personal investment or experience in either.

People ideologically discuss from a position of wealth somewhere a long way from Gregory a future without either industry. Those of us living in the present, though, face daily the struggle to exist either financially or socially. Change in and of itself is not a bad thing but it needs justification, reason and fairness. No greater environmentalist exists than someone who is reliant on the environment for a living, yet the ideologically driven Green movement would have us believe that all miners and agricultural producers are vandals or thieves. I stand here today in this hallowed place to play my role in countering that claim and in restoring the services and support that those industries need to survive, thrive and grow our economy. New industries and technologies will certainly be prominent in our future but that will be to complement, not counter, mining and agriculture.

I also wish to speak to my knowledge of the value of small business in rural and remote Australia. In no industry is this more relevant, though, than coal or agriculture as well as tourism. Mechanical repairs, hose fittings, shutdown repairs, tyre fitting services, cleaning, catering, hospitality—I could go on—all require and are integral to, and are almost totally dependent on, those sectors in Gregory and so many other areas of rural and remote Queensland.

Transport and logistics as a holistic sector is no different, yet the continued challenges faced by this sector impact as significantly as any other, if not more, the cost of living for individuals and the viability of businesses in Gregory. A strong, safe and successful transport sector, especially road freight, is essential to see vibrant and growing communities in the regions. Livestock transport operators like Steve Oppermann from Rolleston and Gerard Johnson from Tambo relay to me constantly the almost daily occurrences of road surface incidents, overregulation, escalating costs and accessibility issues.

I also came to the decision to stand in this place because of the decline in quality, safe infrastructure in Gregory. State road maintenance is a distant memory. A proficient and fully functioning rail system in regional Queensland for freight other than coal is a thing of the past. When you represent the largest electorate by area in this place, you are only too acutely aware of the need for effective and efficient transportation.

I can report to the House in my first offering that Gregory has neither effective nor efficient transportation access. Degraded rail services and road surfaces which are downright dangerous and of a poor, Third World standard are the norm. Capacity constraints such as poor or degraded quality roads are restraining the local economy, way of life and general community wellbeing. I look forward to working hard with the Minister for Transport and Main Roads to identify strategies for improved road safety and to kickstart the delivery of the beef road corridors program that I championed so hard as mayor. This will see the sealing of roads that are vital to agriculture, tourism and mining.

The delivery of a key funding commitment to the Blackall Woolscour will result in the delivery of the final business case to hopefully see the development of the domestic wool-scouring capacity—something almost unheard of in recent times. I thank the Minister for Primary Industries for his recent visit to the electorate in this regard.

All of this is possible thanks to Queenslanders who voted for a fresh start for Queensland, not just in Gregory but right around the state. I have stated in many forums that all levels of government serve the community better when they find ways to help and improve rather than develop institutional roadblocks. Innovation is fundamental to any success—individuals, community and business all do it better than government. A hand up, not a handout, achieves substantially better long-term benefits. No better indicator of this is our government's commitment to deliver renal dialysis services to the Emerald community—something held up for so long by bureaucratic inertia.

Connectivity and telecommunications across the state are not reflective of a modern country. In an era that is fast being consumed by digitalisation and the cloud, we have so many levels of government, industry and society generally in the dark as to how to fully harness and access available technology and communication methods. When coupled with Telstra's blasé approach to regional communications, solutions and maintenance, we are seeing the general retardation of our economy and way of life by stealth, along with the waste of hundreds of millions of dollars on misdirected or blanket-approach solutions instead of place-based and need-driven solutions. I intend to be a voice and a vehicle for improved understanding and delivery of connectivity related issues and solutions, including futureproofing and delivering in real time to ensure remote Queensland is not left behind.

Along with the honour of being the member for Gregory, I have the additional responsibility of being the Assistant Minister for Primary Industry Development, Water and Western Queensland. I thank the Premier for the trust he has shown in offering me this role and reaffirm my commitment to undertake this role and support the ministry to the best of my ability.

In closing, I wish to reiterate my thanks to Sarah and my family for supporting me in this endeavour. The enormity of the task is only outstripped by the knowledge that, if successful, my contributions may assist in securing a future for the regions, industry and families of rural Queensland. In doing so, I will continue a history of my family's contribution to our community and industry groups.

Mr Deputy Speaker Kempton and honourable members, I look forward to embracing this new role and working hard to help the Crisafulli LNP government deliver better, fairer and stronger outcomes through Queensland's fresh start.