




Speech By
Hon. Ann Leahy

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

Record of Proceedings, 24 June 2025

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Hon. A LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (Minister for Local Government and Water and Minister for Fire, Disaster Recovery and Volunteers) (4.45 pm): It is my pleasure to rise to contribute to the address-in-reply debate. I wish to extend my best wishes to Her Excellency, Governor Dr Jeannette Young. I hope Her Excellency receives this message as she is busy with her duties across the state. I especially acknowledge Her Excellency for the time she has spent with disaster impacted communities across the state.

My time in this House has reinforced a fundamental principle upon which I reflected during my maiden speech some 10 years ago in this House. As members of parliament, we are the servants of the people who have elected us. In my more than 30 years of working in politics, this is the underlying principle that has guided me. It is an honour to represent the people of Warrego and I thank them again for placing their trust in me. I am the first female member elected to the seat of Warrego since Federation. I now find myself as the first female cabinet minister to have held this seat since Federation. No matter where my work has taken me, I have never lost sight of my ultimate duty to the people whom I serve. As the people's servant, I know just how much the west and south-west bring to the table. More than this, especially as a minister I serve all of Queensland and all Queenslanders.

Before I turn to the portfolios I hold, I would like to highlight the beautiful Warrego electorate and what matters to those Queenslanders in the electorate who call it home. Before I do, I would like to thank my wonderfully dedicated electorate staff: Gerardine, Paige, Shae, Kate, Anita, Sarah, Bree and Briony, who comes back and helps us during her uni holidays—thank you for everything. I value your support so much and I cannot express enough just how grateful I am. Your work for the people of Warrego never goes unnoticed. I also thank the volunteers at the last election who worked on pre-poll across the Warrego electorate. I thank the volunteers of all parties, because it is certainly not easy to man all of those polling booths right across a seat that spans an area larger than the state of Victoria.

I have campaigned on roads, in particular the widening of roads and particularly those single-lane bitumen roads that carry heavy vehicles. Unfortunately, following 10 years of Labor neglect our roads are in need of maintenance and much needed upgrades. I have campaigned, and will continue to do so, for the widening of these state roads. One that is very high on my list is the Roma-Condamine Road, which is a great alternative road. Should anything happen on the Warrego Highway, we can certainly use that Roma-Condamine Road as a secondary route for access to much of western and south-western Queensland.

I also campaigned for safety upgrades to known black spots, like the intersection at the Gums and key disaster pinch points like the Eulo River bridge. The Eulo River bridge has been cut for six weeks at a time. It is a 90-year-old bridge and it needs to be raised. Also, the approaches at the Loudoun Bridge near Dalby are part of my plans to assist communities across the electorate and keep them connected with the rest of the world, particularly during weather events.

For some years I have also campaigned with the local community for a CT scanner at the Charleville Hospital. I know the local mayor, Zoro Radnedge, was particularly excited when I rang him and said that I wanted to run that campaign again. This is a most important piece of equipment, as lung cancer is the fifth most common cancer and the leading cause of cancer deaths. CT scanning offers early detection, and up to 70 per cent of lung cancers can be detected at early stages through screening. We know that the south-west has a very high number of smokers as well as people who are exposed to a lot of dust so screening is particularly important in that south-west area. South-West Queensland has only one CT scanner based at Roma. With the changes for lung cancer screening, it is important that people further west have access to a CT scanner closer to them for lung cancer screening as well as for accidents and emergencies. Charleville is very well placed for this because it is a flying doctor base as well. Without that easy access to screening, these people will not be diagnosed. Many people are unable to travel the long distances and they simply will not access those screening services.

One of the most pressing issues across my electorate is the lack of housing. Unfortunately, Labor governments over the previous 10 years sat on their hands when it came to activating more land for housing and more housing in the Warrego electorate. If you want to buy a block of land in Dalby, Roma or many other communities, you simply will not find one. There are very few vacant blocks left in these communities to build on. If you want to rent a home, you will probably think there is a problem with realestate.com because when you type in these community names there is nothing to rent. If you had a look at realestate.com now for St George, Roma or Charleville, you will find that there are no properties at all to rent.

Our homes are full and our rental properties are full. We desperately need more housing, more blocks of land for housing and more homes to be built. The lack of housing is causing worker shortages, including childcare workers, and that is creating a compounding impact for many businesses and, might I say, government departments as well. Sadly, even places like Roma and Dalby are seeing people who are homeless. We need more supply of land lots and more homes built on that land so we can free up rental accommodation and ensure families have a roof over their heads. Our businesses have lots of jobs, and some of them are extremely well-paying jobs, but we simply do not have the homes or the land to build on to attract people to take up these jobs.

I want to give a shout-out to the country universities, of which there are a number in my electorate. In fact, the most successful country university in Australia is in Roma in my electorate. It is a great model for those students who want to stay in their own community and further their studies. Many students are the first in their family to be undertaking tertiary study and many are from an Indigenous background. It is giving them access to university education which they never would have done if they had to move away to undertake study.

I want to touch on the floods and severe weather events that hit us in the far west of my electorate. I want to thank all of the mayors—‘Tractor’ Ferguson, mayor of the Bulloo shire; Ben Hall, mayor of the Quilpie shire; Suzette Beresford, mayor of the Paroo shire; and Zoro Radnedge, mayor of the Murweh shire—because the region was particularly impacted. In Hungerford, we had water under the police station and homes that were flooded when people were away; it was very distressing for them. In Eulo, homes were flooded and the water overtopped the levee there. It was a very extensive flood in that area.

Sadly, in Thargomindah around 90 per cent of the homes and businesses were impacted by floodwater. We have a beautiful council facility and chambers out there and that was flooded right through. That is now being stripped out and repaired. The floods went through the Oasis Motel accommodation as well as the school, and the Premier and I recently visited the school. When I was at Thargomindah during the floods, I said to the engineer that it would be a good idea to put some marks at the flood height. As the Premier and I walked through the school, we saw those blue lines everywhere through the school indicating the height of those floodwaters—and that height was quite frightening. We had never in living memory seen water at that height through places like Thargomindah. In Eromanga, homes were flooded. The water went through the town but, fortunately, it did not go through the Natural History Museum which is on a higher spot in Eromanga. It would have been devastating if it had got to our dinosaur museum because it is an extremely precious asset not just for the Warrego electorate but for the whole of Australia and the world.

In Adavale, all of the homes apart from the police station were flooded, and that has been a very traumatic experience for those Adavale residents. I met with many of them and I am happy to go back and meet with them again because it is a very difficult situation at Adavale. That community is in a couple of creek beds and it has already been moved once out of floodwaters, so there is certainly a lot of work there to do. What they have been through has been traumatic for them.

In between all of these communities, there are many homesteads which had never experienced floodwaters. Unfortunately, that has now happened and it has destroyed machinery, there have been stock losses and there is a huge amount of fencing across that region that will take some time to repair. In the Quilpie shire alone, it took 10 years to put in place all of the exclusion fencing. We have managed to get a package of \$105 million to help with the restitution of that fencing. I know it will take some time to do that and to help those people get back on their feet.

I want to say that, even amongst all of these things that happened, it looks absolutely amazing in the communities out at Jundah, Thargomindah and further west to Lake Eyre. If anyone is planning to visit Western Queensland and go out to Lake Eyre, now is the time to do it. It looks amazing; it is green and it is beautiful. It is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Those communities are absolutely open for business and they would love to have people come out and visit them during school holidays or at any other time because it helps their economy and it helps them get back than on their feet.

I would now like to turn to matters of my portfolios. I have been tasked with a number of portfolios, all of which I have a passion for when delivering for Queensland and its people. Local government, water, fire, disaster recovery and volunteers are portfolios that combine well with each other. They are all interconnected in some way and they are critical to the fresh start that Queenslanders deserve. The Crisafulli government knows how important councils are for delivering for local communities, and we appreciate that councils know their local communities best. We also know that we work best when we work together in a partnership with our local councils. We are ensuring that they have the tools they need to make these communities great places to live, work and raise a family, now and into the future.

No two of our 77 councils are the same and we must work together to best respond to the unique needs of Queensland's diverse regions. I am proud to say that we have already made inroads. Whether it is the new Equal Partners in Government agreement or the Works for Queensland program or the red-tape-reduction taskforce, we are working on empowering our elected local government representatives. For far too long, Queensland mayors, CEOs and councillors have been disrespected by those members opposite. The Crisafulli government are taking this stand for councils and we aim to empower our councils to deliver for their Queensland communities.

The Crisafulli government recognise how important water is to this state. In fact, the very fundamentals of life as we know it revolve around water. After nearly 10 years in government, Labor left Queenslanders with some of the highest water bills in the country and literally crumbling infrastructure. In fact, they actually tore down a dam at Paradise. Not only are consumers paying for the price of Labor's failures every time they turn on the tap; we also learned coming into government that there were infrastructure blowouts under Labor. Labor's mismanagement led to billions in infrastructure blowouts. The Paradise Dam cost blew out by \$3.2 billion. The Lake MacDonald cost was up by \$138 million. The Burdekin Falls Dam costs blew out by \$623 million. The Somerset Dam costs blew out by \$590 million.

Affordable and secure water resources are central to Queensland's economic growth, and the Crisafulli government has a clear vision for delivering water security for all Queenslanders. This includes an analysis of all 23 water plans in this term of government, with a focus on boosting supply and affordability. This will require input from key stakeholders. I look forward to continuing to work closely with our stakeholders to deliver this whole-of-state plan.

As well as this, we are undertaking an urgent review of the water sources for South-East Queensland. This includes a comprehensive review of the options for South-East Queensland's water supply, including attention towards flood mitigation for communities along the Brisbane River. Delivering long-term water infrastructure, boosting supply and increasing affordability are at the heart of this government's watertight plan.

Volunteers also help Queensland to function. Supporting this sector is vital and even more important in the lead-up to the 2032 Olympics. Volunteers give selflessly of their time, many of them putting their community needs in front of their own. Like everything else, the previous Labor government took these vital Queenslanders for granted. Labor did not even have a portfolio recognition of volunteers. It took the LNP to do that. I am proud to be the Minister for Volunteers to recognise and empower those people who volunteer for our communities. That is why our government have established a parliamentary inquiry into volunteering within our first 100 days. We want volunteers' voices to be heard. The Crisafulli government is committed to removing barriers and creating more pathways to volunteering. We want to make sure that anyone who has a passion to make a difference in their local community has every opportunity to become a volunteer.

It is also an honour in my capacity as Minister for Disaster Recovery to work with the Queensland Reconstruction Authority. Queensland is Australia's most disaster-prone state and we have seen this firsthand so far this year. At present, 73 of the 77 councils are disaster declared. Experiencing three major disasters back-to-back, we have Queenslanders' backs and we will be with them through this long tail of recovery.

As a government, we have worked with all levels of government to coordinate Queensland's recovery and reconstruction works within the disaster-affected communities. Whether it has been the historic floods hitting the North and Far North cutting Queenslanders off from the rest of the country, or the South-East where Queenslanders faced the brunt of ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred, or in Western Queensland where an area twice the size of Victoria was swamped with floodwaters, we have delivered joint packages funded by state and Commonwealth governments to support community clean-up, road restoration, environmental recovery, tourism support and mental health services. We will continue to deliver more support; we are there for the long haul.

I would now like to touch on our fires. From structure fires to road accidents, bushfires to navigating swiftwater rescues and disasters, our fire department go above and beyond for us. Both the Queensland Fire and Rescue and the Rural Fire Service are there when Queenslanders most need them. Part of this important work includes making sure our fires have the new fire and rescue stations where they are needed most, expanding the digital fire rating signage for them and providing fit-for-purpose appliances for rural fire brigades. The dedicated Rural Fire Service volunteer members do an outstanding job, volunteering their time to protect people, their property and their communities. Queensland communities must have confidence in our fire department and its capabilities and their ability to respond to disasters and emergencies, no matter where they live.

The services provided by the Queensland Fire Department are world-class and provide an exceptional level of service to our communities. After 10 years of Labor failures and inactions, Queenslanders deserve a fresh start—a fresh start that will deliver water security and affordability, a fresh start that will empower our local governments, a fresh start that will make it easier for Queenslanders to give back, a fresh start that will put our frontline fires first, and a fresh start that will see us recover stronger from the disasters that have tested so many of our communities across the state. The Crisafulli government will deliver the fresh start Queenslanders need, restoring trust, driving opportunity and building a future that Queenslanders can all enjoy and believe in.