




Speech By
David Kempton

MEMBER FOR COOK

Record of Proceedings, 24 June 2025

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Mr KEMPTON** (Cook—LNP) (9.16 pm): Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to deliver my second speech in reply, having delivered my maiden speech at 5.40 pm on 31 May 2012. It was with some reflection I returned to this House after the 2024 election result and sat quietly in my old seat that is now occupied by the member for Thuringowa. I contemplated the decade that had elapsed since my untimely removal as the first LNP member to ever hold the seat of Cook since 2015. It is a title I am grateful and humbled to have restored in 2024. I was the member for Cook in the 2012-15 Newman LNP government and was the assistant minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs. Whilst my tenure was cut short by the Newman excesses and ultimate loss of government, I was privileged to have been given the opportunity to serve my beloved electorate of Cook.

My maiden speech will record that I first came to Cape York in 1985 and was so taken with it and all it had to offer that I returned in 1988 to Cooktown where I opened the first law practice in 50 years. I developed an interest in the cattle industry and embarked on a love for the region, its communities and its peoples which has endured in one form or another for five decades.

I am pleased to see my long-term friend Pat Weir in the Speaker's chair and the Deputy Speaker position ably occupied by the member for Scenic Rim—yourself—with whom I served all those years ago. I am honoured to have been appointed a Temporary Speaker among colleagues who all endeavour to retain the respect and responsibility ascribed to this chamber.

The Premier was the minister for local government when I was last in this House all those years ago. He was a young man in a hurry. He was one of the many casualties in the 2015 defeat where young, energetic members who represented our future such as Robert Cavallucci, Lisa France, Saxon Rice and others were lost to politics forever. In 2017, David Crisafulli returned to politics and ultimately led the LNP opposition to victory in 2024. The rest is history.

The Premier has personally developed considerably in the ensuing decade and is now measured and responsive. He displays all the qualities of a statesman so rarely seen in our modern political environment. Above all, he says and then he does with unwavering determination.

I am forever indebted to my friend Max Dickens, my campaign manager, who selflessly came out of retirement to lead me once again to victory in October 2024, which saw me elected as the member for Cook for the second time. He is the only man in the history of the seat to run not one but two elections on behalf of the LNP. On election night when the numbers started to come in and it did not look so good, we all became a little bit apprehensive about the result. When I saw Max walk to the bar and buy a beer I knew we were over the line.

I cannot express enough my gratitude to the team of volunteers who manned every booth in the electorate whilst Labor struggled to turn up at all. I am also grateful to those ministers who travelled from their electorate in the hurly-burly of the election campaign to support me in the north: Andrew Powell, who fronted a shed full of farmers; Ann Leahy; David Janetzki; and Tony Perrett, who joined me in the Douglas shire on several occasions to reassure a community devastated by Cyclone Jasper and left stranded by Labor and the missing local member that our government would listen and help.

I also acknowledge Councillor Kevin Davies, who put his hand up for the seat and sadly passed away three months after the election, which was a great loss to our community.

I am pleased to have been included in the State Development, Infrastructure and Works Committee under the firm but fair guidance of the very capable Jim McDonald. We have been asked to review vital legislation as we move towards the Olympic and Paralympic Games. It is exciting to be back amongst so many of the colleagues who formed the 54th Parliament and who are now reinvigorated after a decade of thankless opposition. It is equally exciting to be part of a new cohort, bringing renewal and talent to the team. I complained bitterly to the Clerk about being subject to compulsory induction to which he replied in his laconic manner, 'They have invented telephones since you were last here.'

I also enjoy sitting on this side of the House with five of us here in the trenches and on the front line trying to represent the government side of the House as best we can. I am happy to join Bree James, the member for Barron River, with her drive and her sense of humour which is in a class of its own, and Terry James, the member for Mulgrave, who has a lifetime of public service. We are part of the northern force and hope in time the member for Cairns might see his way to working with us to bring about a brighter future for our unique and incredible part of the world.

Finally, I am ever grateful to the voters of Cook who were not accepting of the Labor member after seven years of neglect and saw in me someone who would truly represent them, speak up and turn up every time. From the date of my preselection in May 2024, at the leader's request I embedded myself in the community of Mossman to provide support, leadership and hope in the face of the imminent failure of the sugarmill and, ultimately, the 134-year-old sugar industry, a task I am still involved in today as our government works with the community towards a more certain future. Bree and I saw the dismal state of the Barron River bridge and embarked on a relentless campaign to see it replaced. Minister Mickelberg still ducks for cover every time he sees us coming, but the bridge is in the budget and will be built.

The first task I undertook when elected was to meet my commitment to the Mareeba people to return the electorate office to Mareeba as the former member had selfishly closed it. The next task was to find the right mix of staff to ensure we have a compatible, competent team to ensure that all the people in Cook feel they are being listened to wherever they might come from. This task has taken some time with some early hiccups. However, we now have one of the best functioning and most well run electorate offices in the state. I do encourage caution, however, when employing campaign or party members as they do not always make the best electorate officers.

I acknowledge and appreciate all of my team: Lachy, who once worked for Lachlan Millar and is now my EO—all six foot three of him—is loyal, professional and 100 per cent reliable; Emily, who comes to me from the media sector and has insight beyond her young years; Anwen, who worked for me in the last term and is the front line of my operation with her no-nonsense approach to constituents and, at times, myself; Helen, a farmer with an artistic flair, sense of community and a quick humour; Nikki, is indomitable with her good nature and community elections; Tash, the ideas girl who brings energy and local connection; and, finally, Talei, my northernmost team member upon whom I rely to be the eyes and ears of the cape and Torres. I admire their unswerving loyalty and dedication and infinite patience as they drag me kicking and screaming into the modern technological and digital world—no mean feat.

I can only stand in awe at the people my two daughters, Melanie and Sophie, have become as they have given me their unswerving love and loyalty over many years whilst they have navigated the trials and tribulations of their own lives. I have, effective this Friday, relinquished my practising certificate after 50 years in the law as a mark of my commitment to the people of Cook and my teammates in this government. While ever I am fit and able, I will continue to serve both to the best of my ability. It is good to be back.