




Speech By
Rob Molhoek

MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Mr MOLHOEK** (Southport—LNP) (7.50 pm): On 24 March 2012 I was first elected as the member for Southport—the engine room of the Gold Coast. It is a little known fact that Southport is home to almost 20 per cent of all employment in our city. I would like to begin by expressing my heartfelt gratitude to the people of Southport for once again placing their trust in me to represent them in this great chamber. Representing Southport is both humbling and an incredible privilege. I also want to acknowledge and thank my wife and family, my sons, my daughters-in-law, grandkids, nephews and nieces, my great-nephews and great-nieces, and my brother and sister, because each election has become a real family affair and something of a family reunion. I am grateful for all of them who came and helped, particularly on election day.

I also want to thank my local party branch, my SEC chair and campaign chair, Mark Sutton, and many volunteers like Andrea and Bevan Chivers; Roger Patterson; Doug and Sue Lipp; Bruce Vasey-Brown; Anita Whimpey; Jack Punshon; Kim Goldup-Graham, an old school friend, and her husband, Steve; Liisa Stanley; Allan Godbee; Allan and Kaye Hayes; Ian Harry; Arthur Lord; John and Katie Bond; Samantha Delmerge; Peter Doggett; Reg Williams; James Kennett; Geoff Smith; Steve Lutz and so many others for their support last November and repeatedly over multiple campaigns this past decade.

I also want to add a vote of thanks to my electorate office team and especially to Aaron Payne, who is, I think, one of the outstanding electorate officers in the state and who has supported me tirelessly over many years, but also thanks to Liam Ginn, Tara Douglas and Linda Maunder for their efforts and support since the election and over many years of service to the parliament and the people of Southport.

To the Premier, the Deputy Premier and my colleagues: thank you for your support, leadership and commitment.

As many members know, in early 2023 my life was turned upside down by a stroke. This health challenge was a moment in my life that brought immense uncertainty, yet it also revealed the support that I have in Southport and across the broader community. There were afternoons in hospital when I would come back from rehab and there would be five, six or seven people waiting to visit, and that happened every day for eight weeks, and so I am very grateful for that. I also want to thank the healthcare professionals from Gold Coast uni and Robina health services and my many friends and family members who supported me through that. I also particularly want to say thank you to the Hon. Heidi Victoria, who is the national chair of the Stroke Foundation, for her support and encouragement. It was great to have her and Dr Lisa Murphy here on Tuesday for the launch of Parliamentary Friends of Stroke.

I particularly want to pay tribute to all of the volunteers of the Southport SES during the recent cyclone and storm events that we have experienced on the Gold Coast, the emergency services personnel and volunteers, the Energex workers, the police and the health workers who have endured incredibly challenging circumstances to continue to look out for the safety and wellbeing of Gold

Coasters. I also want to give a shout-out to Patrice Poutu and Edith and Mal Kennedy and volunteers at Set Free Care in Southport which provided shelter to more than 50 rough sleepers and chronically homeless people during those terrible weeks of torrential rain and storm activity.

While I was first elected a decade ago, that was not my first time in public service—I was elected to the Gold Coast city council in 2004—and over my 20-year tenure of public and community service I have worked to deliver many meaningful projects and policies for my community and Gold Coasters generally. I am proud to have delivered the redevelopment of the Broadwater Parklands, the aquatic centre, new boat ramps and improvements to the Gold Coast Spit, the raising of the Hinze Dam for flood mitigation and storage, stages 1 and 2 of Gold Coast Light Rail, the Coomera Indoor Sports Centre, the Gold Coast Hockey Centre and the aquatics centre for the Commonwealth Games and Skilled Park, which was an interesting negotiation. Many years ago as a radio station manager I was invited to the premier's drinks here at parliament—it was the first time I had ever been at parliament—and I ended up in a conversation with the then treasurer, Terry Mackenroth, Shane Edwards and Wayne Bennett.

Ms Grace: That would've been enlightening.

Mr MOLHOEK: Thank you for that interjection. It was an enlightening conversation, but I was basically told that the Gold Coast was never going to secure an NRL team. The treasurer of the day ended the conversation by saying something to the effect of: 'If you can convince the NRL to put a team on the coast, I'll give you the money for a stadium, but I can say that because you're never going to get the NRL to commit.' Anyway, I hopped in the car that evening and on my way back to the Gold Coast I rang David Gallop and Michael Searle and said, 'Well, we've got the team,' and they said, 'What do you mean?' I said, 'Well, the treasurer just said that if we got a licence he'd build a stadium and you've been saying if we can get a stadium we'll have a team.' It was shortly after that that Michael Searle, Paul Broughton and others met with the then premier and they were able to do a deal. That, thankfully, was the beginning of the Gold Coast Titans.

Other things I am proud to have delivered during my time and as a result of the Commonwealth Games are major road upgrades to Smith Street, Olsen Avenue, Ferry Road, High Street, Ross Street and Bundall Road—all major roads through my electorate and some of the major transport routes to the new Gold Coast University Hospital but nonetheless important links. They have carried us well over the last few years as the city has continued to grow.

On the subject of the Titans, a few weeks ago it was my pleasure to attend the season launch with the member for Mermaid Beach, Ray Stevens. It is a little known fact that Ray and I can probably take credit as being founding fathers of the Titans. Prior to the Titans, back in 1997 or 1998, Ray and I worked together in the fight to save the Gold Coast Chargers. The two of us and Geoff Smith, who is now the chair of Sports Gold Coast, worked together to put together a business plan to save the Chargers and then on the eve of being appointed to that board were unceremoniously dumped by David Barnhill from the New South Wales Rugby League. We never got to achieve that goal of saving the Chargers, but we fought on for another 10 years and today we have an outstanding team, who are going to absolutely thrash the Dolphins on Saturday afternoon at the Gold Coast. During the course of the launch I was a little embarrassed. I was chatting with the team captain, Tino Fa'asuamaleaui, and I was recounting something of the history and the involvement of Ray, me and others in setting up the club so many years ago when Tino gently but politely remarked, 'I wasn't even born back then,' and I could hear my boys saying, 'Oh, Dad, you're such a boomer.'

I am incredibly excited about the Olympics, as I was about the Commonwealth Games. When I was first elected we talked about what we needed to do in developing a strategy towards 2018 to get the most out of the games for Southport and the Gold Coast, and now here we stand tonight with a great plan to move ahead. I have to congratulate the Premier and Deputy Premier for the work they have done in recent weeks, as well as the minister for the games.

As we move towards 2032, I will be excited to see more development in my patch. Southport is the centre of the universe, in case members missed that. One of the games villages is proposed for Royal Pines just down the road from where I live. There is talk of a Gold Coast city arena, a proposal that the mayor has put up. There are still some challenges with that, but I certainly will be advocating and supporting that project with the mayor, whether it is in Carey Park or somewhere else in the city. All those things are yet to be worked out. That will be a great legacy for the Gold Coast.

I am also proud to have served with then deputy premier Jeff Seeney during the Commonwealth Games period. During that tenure we made decisions about scrapping some of the temporary facilities that were proposed for Southport and instead moved those facilities into a permanent sports centre in Coomera. I am sure the member for Coomera would agree that is a great legacy for his electorate, given the population and the many young people who need to be engaged in sport. We also expanded

facilities at Carrara beyond what was originally planned. That sports centre is running at full tilt and is again another great legacy. They are good examples of what a legacy you can create through good planning. My sincere hope is that we will see an incredible legacy from the games.

While I am talking about the games, it was my great privilege back in the late nineties—and I am sounding like a boomer again—after being approached by the mayor Gary Baidon, to join what was the Queensland Olympic Team Fund, which was an official subcommittee of the Olympic Games here in the state. Our role was to raise money to support Queensland athletes. Over the period of about two years we managed to raise more than \$2 million. That was an amazing time and ended up with us going to the opening ceremony in Sydney, which was one of those great evenings of one's life.

The other achievement that holds special significance to me is the establishment of the Gold Coast Community Fund. That was established in 1999 as a spin-off from the Gold Coast Hospital Foundation. It has been great to see how Steve Cavallier and Rutland Smith from Harvey Norman, and so many others, have stepped into roles to raise millions of dollars for community support. Back then we had a very simple goal: to come together as a group of businesspeople and community leaders, use our collective influence and talent to raise money and then give it out to whoever we wanted to, for whatever reason, wherever we saw need. I am pleased to say that today the community fund continues to do that. They are doing a lot better job than we did. We managed to raise about \$100 thousand a year back in those days, but in recent years they have been raising upwards of \$1 million a year. It is fantastic to see that going back into the community.

This year we have set a new target for the Gold Coast CEO Sleepout. After seven years as an ambassador we have raised enough money for land in Nerang and this year they will start construction of 60 new apartments for families in need. This year we have raised the bar and Col Wheeler, one of my great friends, has suggested we set the target at \$1 million. Ambassadors Jamie Preston, Belinda Dawes from the *Gold Coast Bulletin*, Karen Phillips, who is a well-known personality on the Gold Coast, and Tania Byrne from Celebrity Ink—a great advocate in the community—have all banded together and last night they had over 50 people at a function to sign people up for the challenge this year. Hopefully we will see a record number of participants as well.

While I am talking about the community, there are so many organisations that need our help and so many organisations that we as members are privileged to be a part of. I heard the member for Nudgee talking about some of her commitments. I have made commitments to both U3A and Gold Coast Community Legal Service that we would find some money to find them permanent homes. Both those organisations have been operating for many years out of substandard facilities with no ownership and no security of tenure. That is a challenge that I have taken up on their behalf and hope to fulfil this year.

I am also proud to say that I have just completed my 20th year of service with Bravehearts. I have spoken about them on many occasions in this chamber. Bravehearts have recently redefined their vision and it is simply this: a world where people, communities and systems all work together to protect children from sexual abuse. I think that is a great aspiration and I am sure it is one that everyone in the House would agree is something that we as members of parliament should also set as a goal as we seek to govern this state and provide support for those thousands of young people who tonight are not living in their own homes, who are out there as foster kids or in youth foyers or in residential care. We all need to do much better in that respect.

I will now turn to housing, which is another passion of mine along with child protection. It was many years ago that I convinced the member for Everton to establish a trial of a youth foyer in Logan, which was successful and resulted in a second youth foyer in Southport with 40 beds. It was delivered by the other government, but nonetheless is an important measure. I was so pleased when the previous government announced eight more youth foyers across the state and I am really excited that the housing minister has announced that there will be more. My view is that youth foyers are probably the most effective model of care and leave residential care for dead in terms of outcomes and, frankly, is a much more cost-effective model and one that I believe we should continue to pursue.

I am also a passionate advocate for Common Ground. While we did not start the project, we got to open the project in South Brisbane. The results from Common Ground and the work of Micah in South Brisbane have been absolutely outstanding. While so many other models of housing do not adequately address chronic homelessness and people with significant health issues, mental health issues, drug and alcohol issues and PTSD, Common Ground goes the extra mile and supports those people.

I think the last time I checked, the average length of tenancy at South Brisbane was seven years. It is not that anyone is in a hurry to push people out, but there is a trend that with proper care and support over time people are able to transition out of that environment. It is so important, not just

because we want to take better care of people who are chronically homeless, but we need to be more considerate of other people who are in public and affordable housing. One of the things that has driven me in the push for Common Ground on the Gold Coast—and I will be up-front, my goal is to see Common Ground in every major population centre of Australia—is because I think it is the right thing to do. It is also good policy. It is good financial policy because it is much more cost effective than the alternative which is constantly dealing with people on the street.

We heard from the Queensland Nurses and Midwives' Union about two or three years ago now about the work of Common Ground in South Brisbane. They estimated that through the community nursing program they were saving the health system about \$6½ million a year in mental health beds, police and ambulance officer time. I think it is good policy and it is the right thing to do. It saves lives; it saves money. It moves people out of public housing areas where other vulnerable people are afraid. I cannot tell you how many times I have had a little old lady or a family in public housing at Keebra Park or Lenneberg Street or somewhere else in my electorate call and say, 'I'm scared. I've got this guy running around in the car park at three o'clock in the morning, naked and shouting at aliens', or 'There's been people down the back doing drug deals behind the rubbish bins.' I think we need to better manage those people with those higher needs. My sincere hope is that in this term of government we will do better in terms of more housing, because housing is such an important key to dealing with so many other social justice issues.

I have 18 schools in my electorate. Some of them are in need of sporting centres, gyms or performing arts centres. We made some commitments a few years back, but we have not won enough elections to do anything about them. I have a big shopping list, Treasurer and Minister for Education, and I will be pushing to fulfil those commitments.

In closing I want to say thank you to everyone. Thank you to the Southport community. To David and my LNP colleagues in the chamber, thank you for working hard to secure this term in parliament. Thank you also to the Premier for appointing me as chair of the Health, Environment and Innovation Committee.