




Speech By  
**Stephen Bennett**

**MEMBER FOR BURNETT**

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Record of Proceedings, 24 June 2025

**ADDRESS-IN-REPLY**

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (11.59 am): I thank the opposition for coming in to listen to my speech in the address-in-reply; it is nice to have you all here!

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Krause): Member for Burnett, just wait a minute, please. I will take this opportunity to let the member for Logan know that he is on a warning until the break.

**Mr BENNETT:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I want to congratulate you and Mr Speaker on your role. It has been a great privilege to see you roll on with that job. I want to welcome all the new members. It is a pleasure to serve the great state of Queensland with you all. I want to thank the LNP team, including our tireless liaison officer, Nathan. I thank our leadership team on a great and dignified campaign: David Crisafulli, Jarrod Bleijie, Deb, Brent, Bryson and Tony. They were all shadow ministers who did a great job to build a platform and deliver election success. This team worked hard and continues to work hard every day for the people of Queensland. What a privilege it has been to hear many of the first speeches from our fantastic new members on all sides of the parliament. They all share a passion and drive that Queenslanders deserve and expect.

It is an honour to be back in the 58th Parliament. It is never lost on me that it is a privilege to be elected to such a significant role—a role that comes with much responsibility, trust and expectation. As I look back over the photos, messages of support and the sheer amount of work that has gone into the last 13 years, I feel immense pride and gratitude. The significance of what has been achieved in the Burnett area and across Queensland has not been lost on me. I am humbled by the support and honoured to serve our community as the member for Burnett. After five elections, I am still blown away that I continue to have so much support from the people who live in the most amazing place in Queensland, and I could not be more proud to serve you. I want to thank the Premier for asking me to serve as Chair of the Primary Industries and Resources Committee. I will take on that role and responsibility; the work we have to do is immense.

The seat of Burnett is home to amazing agricultural and tourism enterprises: the outer islands of Lady Elliot and Lady Musgrave, the Mon Repos visitors' centre, where the amazing nesting sea turtles can be seen, and Bundaberg Rum and Bundaberg Brewed Drinks. We have the amazing coastal communities of Woodgate, Childers, Buxton, Apple Tree Creek Elliott Heads, Coral Cove, Innes Park, Bargara, Burnett Heads, Moore Park Beach, the Hummock, Gooburru, South Kolan, Bucca, Sharon, Givelda, Avondale, Yandaran, Rosedale, Miriam Vale, Bororen, Agnes Water, Seventeen Seventy, Turkey Beach and of course our destination of choice as a family, the Broadwater and Baffle Creek.

I want to thank all of the volunteers and supporters for their efforts. Thanks go to my campaign team and Burnett SEC members. Thanks Fiona, my wife who puts in a mountain of work not only during the elections but over the last 13 years and five election campaigns. I thank Tony, Sven, Brian and all the team who continue to put so much in every year to make sure the Burnett SEC is the strongest it can be. I thank you very much. I have been married for 38 years and I have three terrific kids and we enjoy six grandchildren in our lives. We are lucky that they all now reside in Bundaberg.

**A government member** interjected.

**Mr BENNETT:** We love them very much and thank them for all that they do. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank a dear friend and former Burnett electorate officer, Kath. Kath was supporting our community in her role with me. Each day she went above and beyond to help residents, groups, friends, colleagues and myself. Kath recently passed and I know that she will be missed by many in the House and members of our community. Our thoughts and prayers are with Kath's family. Kath was part of a team which always strives for excellence and never gives up, despite some of the challenges faced. As expected, the recent campaign was hard fought and I think many of us underestimated how difficult it would be. It was a dirty campaign, which I have spoken about, which had a personal impact on many, including Kath. Again, our thoughts go out to Kath Sowter and her family. I thank her sincerely for her years of service. I wish her family all the very best.

I want to thank Keith Pitt and the many staff who took leave to work on the state campaign. They are a great bunch in that office, which is now David Batt's office. I want to put on record my thanks and gratitude to Keith and Allison for their years of service to our region as the member for Hinkler. I wish them all the very best in their exciting new career. We will be watching that career with interest as that progresses.

The election was a referendum on the failures of the tired Labor government's performance. We all saw the looming storm clouds across our state, with cost-of-living challenges and pressures on businesses that came with rising electricity prices and increased input costs. We heard time and time again that everyday families were working through those bills at the kitchen table as they kept on rising. Locally, home ownership is a serious challenge that many face. Home ownership rates are down, while the number of families living rough under our bridges is up, which is unacceptable. We made it clear that we want our locals to be in their own homes and we have committed to making that a reality.

Unlike those opposite, we listened and we heard the aspirations of Queenslanders. When people want to own their own home, we have to make that a reality. We are going to give them those opportunities with the first ever state shared equity scheme. We promised during the campaign to remove taxes for the first time in a generation, and we have. What has been noticeable has been our commitment to work with the private sector and charities. We are committed to ensuring there is adequate land supply by releasing infrastructure partnerships to increase supply and get them to market.

What Queenslanders voted for was knowing that we share their aspirations for a home, and we gave them an opportunity to reach this goal. Our government's drive is on aspiration, rewarding those who are willing to have a go and helping those less fortunate who fall through the cracks. It is infrastructure supply partnerships that will get locals into the market, it is more supply which creates downward pressure on rent, and it is finally acknowledging that we must work with our community housing providers—which should have happened a long time ago—and the private sector to make things happen and make sure that every dollar of the Housing Investment Fund builds new supply.

I look forward to working with the community to deliver on the commitments made for both Bundaberg and the Burnett. I look forward to working with CQUniversity to develop the Wide Bay Sports Academy. This is a \$300,000 commitment from the campaign that will enable talented young athletes an opportunity to develop their sporting potential without having to leave the Wide Bay. The academy works with 13- to 19-year-old local athletes in areas like strength and conditioning, nutrition education, sports integrity and injury prevention to help them bridge the gap between being a talented young athlete and a state level athlete. This is an exciting opportunity to see our young athletes thrive.

I also look forward to working with Des at the Burnett Bowls Club on a major upgrade to improve facilities for their players and supporters. This \$500,000 upgrade will see improved disability access at the front entrance, a toilet with disability access, electronic doors at the entrance to provide better access for people with mobility devices, improved energy efficiency with new lighting and cold rooms, new air conditioning, updated floor coverings and furniture, and the removal of asbestos within the building. Our commitment will ensure this 77-year-old club is futureproofed and ready to continue serving the community.

I give a huge shout-out to Dave Facer at Brave Brothers. He and his team go above and beyond for our community around men's mental health and suicide awareness through their mentors. I was proud to stand alongside our candidate for Bundaberg, Bree Watson, to make a \$142,000 funding commitment, which is being honoured, to help deliver Brave Place Safe Space.

The team at Bundaberg Netball have been huge advocates for our region's athletes and they are doing a great job. I am proud to announce that the Crisafulli government will deliver a funding boost of over \$600,000 to improve their facility. The works will include new LED lighting to meet current training

and playing standards, the resurfacing of the all-weather courts and the installation of accessibility pathways around the blue and bitumen courts. Needless to say, there are plenty of exciting times ahead for Bundaberg Netball at their courts.

I want to do a shout-out to the Winfield community who raised concerns about the boat ramp at Rocky Point. We have unfortunately seen many accidents and incidents happen there. We are committed to making sure that project is upgraded and meets the community's expectations going forward. Over the next few months, projects will start to come to fruition. We look forward to making sure that we enjoy the benefits of these projects.

**Mr Stevens:** Kalki Moon Distillery.

**Mr BENNETT:** Yes, Kalki is coming to parliament; I take that interjection.

Bundaberg will also be the location of one of the nine new Regional Reset programs as part of our \$50 million commitment to tackle youth crime across Queensland and restore safety where you live. These out-of-control youths were veering towards a life of crime and we are happy that Bundaberg has been selected as part of that. The Bundaberg program will offer one- to three-week live-in interventions to reset the lives of youth who are demonstrating high-risk behaviour such as aggression, truancy or substance abuse. It will divert them away from criminal activity. Early intervention is not a one-size-fits-all. Some kids will require more intensive intervention to rise above a life of crime, and that is where these Regional Reset programs will come in. I am proud of the promises we made to the electorate and the region. One of those promises was that we will make people safer where they live. Some of our new laws have now been implemented, with more work to be done across Queensland to make sure people are safe and their property remains in their possession.

On a not-so-nice note, I cannot let the actions of the Labor candidate in Burnett go unchallenged. This was the second election where she was rude and made outrageous statements. I say to her: your personal attacks are disgusting and relentless—shame on you. For the record, there is no domestic violence in my home and my wife does not have a brain injury as a result of a car accident, as she consistently claimed for weeks and weeks.

It was bitterly disappointing to not achieve an election result in Bundaberg. I acknowledge that the member for Bundaberg is in the chamber. I do need to do a shout-out to our candidate, Bree Watson, who did work extremely hard in a difficult campaign, but Bree retains her dignity and integrity going forward, and I am sure she will excel in whatever career she elects to pursue in the future.

Finally, to my staff: I thank you for your assistance and professional support. They are the brains trust behind what we do and I never underestimate the fact that Amity, Gemma and Tyler are the team that do such a mountain of work.

I say to the region that there is a lot of work to do after years and years of neglect under those opposite. Let's work to make our region even better. Let's work to ensure we respect our health workers, police, teachers and schools. Our agriculture sector cannot be underestimated and our primary producers deserve all the accolades they get as we drive toward our agricultural endeavours. Our tourism sector needs our support. Our region needs water security support. We need better roads and we need to continue to put the focus on the cost-of-living pressures. I also want to do a shout-out to the arts and festivals communities around the Bundaberg and Burnett regions. They do so much.

It is a pleasure to be a part of this 58th Parliament. I share the role with a lot of colleagues, new and old. I look forward to continuing to serve Burnett as best I can.