



Speech By


**Wayde Chiesa**

**MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK**

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### INAUGURAL SPEECH

 **Mr CHIESA** (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (11.49 am): I rise today with a deep sense of humility and gratitude to deliver my first speech in this House as the member for Hinchinbrook. I stand here today because of the hard work, sacrifice and love of my family and the communities that raised me. I grew up in Ingham. Like so many people from our part of the world, my story begins with my grandparents, who took a chance on this country and this region. They arrived with very little in their pockets but with a great deal of hope, and they chose North Queensland as the place to build a better life.

My dad's dad, my nonno, came from Italy to Ingham in the 1950s. Like many others, he cut cane, saved and worked. Together with my nonna, her sister and his brother-in-law, he eventually bought the family cane farm. My parents live on that farm to this day. My dad and his brothers still run it alongside my brother and a number of my cousins. On my mum's side, my granddad served in the Australian Army. When he was discharged, he was given an Australian Army land settlement block in Braemeadows near Ingham. He, along with my nanna, grew cane and worked the farm.

Between these two families there are 14 children—my aunties and uncles—and 44 cousins, of which I am one. That certainly helps the primary vote for an aspiring politician, let me tell you! More importantly, it means that family, farming and community are at the heart of who I am. Some of my earliest memories are of big family lunches and dinners, parties, running around the farm, playing backyard sports of any kind, surf lifesaving, being in the swimming club and playing junior rugby league.

First and foremost, I want to acknowledge my grandparents, my aunties and uncles, my cousins and my parents. I am one of five children, and my mum and dad have always backed us kids, whatever avenue we chose. Between my siblings and me there are now 13 grandchildren, and it is a real joy to see them building the same close relationships with their cousins that I did with mine growing up around the farm.

Throughout my career I have been privileged to work with some incredibly passionate people. I grew up in the ag industry. I worked helping to support small and family businesses and I worked in the mining industry. Most recently, over the last four years, I had the privilege of working across 14 communities in North and North-West Queensland as the CEO of Regional Development Australia Townsville and North West Queensland. In that role I saw very clearly that when governments genuinely listen to communities we get better outcomes and better lives. I saw councils, chambers of commerce, community groups and industry bringing ideas to the table, and I saw how powerful it is when government partners with rather than talks down to regional communities.

For the last 17 years I have been lucky enough to call rugby league for Triple M's Cowboys Call Team, broadcasting from Gladstone all the way to the cape. I learned very quickly how passionate North Queenslanders are about their patch of paradise. It was an absolute honour to broadcast the North Queensland Cowboys' first ever premiership back in 2015.

I also found myself behind the microphone during natural disasters. I heard the genuine fear and concern in people's voices when Cyclone Yasi hit in February 2011, and I saw firsthand the critical role that government plays in keeping people safe and in the subsequent recovery. 4TO FM's Steve 'Pricey' Price once told me that as a broadcaster you do not let people into your life; they let you into theirs, and you should always remain humble. That advice has always stuck with me. After 17 years of the good people of North Queensland listening to me, I now have the ultimate honour of listening to them. That is what the job is really about for me: using this place and this platform to make sure the voices of North Queensland and Hinchinbrook are heard loudly and clearly.

My family taught me three things: the value of serving one's community, the value of family and the value of hard work. I take those values into this role as the member for Hinchinbrook. I also want to acknowledge Mum and Dad. They are here today. Just over a week ago, Dad won the Queensland state sports award for service to sport after 55 continuous years of service to Forrest Beach Surf Lifesaving Club. I have lost count of the thousands of people he has trained and coached and the state and national medals they have won. My mum has been beside him for every one of those 55 years, always making sure those thousands were well fed and left with a smile on their faces. That is why ahead of Christmas I have only purchased one suit! Their example of quiet, consistent service to others is something that I will carry with me in this place.

My upbringing, my life on the farm and my career as both a chartered accountant and a sports broadcaster have taught me something very simple, and it is what we brought into this campaign: when you listen to community and when you work hard, you can deliver outcomes and results that genuinely improve people's quality of life. Becoming the member for Hinchinbrook was not on the bucket list at the start of 2025, but sometimes it is incredible how things unfold in life. When the opportunity arose—the opportunity to contribute to a part of the world that has given me so much and to leave it a better place—it was simply too important to turn down.

When I finished school in 1995, a large number of my cohort—nearly 80 per cent, in fact—had to move away from Ingham to go to university, to get further training, to take up a trade or to find work. I never want that to be the only option for the kids of today. Whether they are eight or 18, I want them to be able to live, learn and earn in a town or region of their choice. I want them to be able to work in a tourism business in Cardwell, on a banana farm in the Kennedy Valley or on a sugarcane farm just outside of Ingham or get the training, education or job they want without having to leave the northern suburbs of Townsville. They will only be able to do that when governments play their role—when the services are there, when communities are safe, when roads and infrastructure keep pace and when industries are supported and enabled, not held back.

Hinchinbrook is a region full of opportunity, and I intend to work hard to ensure this place reaches its potential. That means backing existing industry, attracting new investment, supporting local small and family businesses and, above all, removing the barriers that stop local people and local communities from getting ahead. The people of Hinchinbrook have one important thing in common: they are passionate about their patch—and why wouldn't they be? From the chimney stacks of the mighty Victoria Mill to Wallaman Falls, the Lucinda Bulk Sugar Terminal, the beaches, the rainforests, the fishing and the beautiful Hinchinbrook Island, this place has it all.

Over the last couple of months, listening to that passion has helped shape our plan for Hinchinbrook. The electorate begins at the Bohle River, to the north of Townsville. The northern part of Townsville includes the suburbs of Burdell, Mount Low, Bushland Beach, Deeragun, Alice River, Rupertswood and Bluewater and the beachside communities of Balgal Beach, Saunders Beach, Toolakea, Toomulla and beyond. This area is home to hardworking tradies, Defence Force personnel, nurses, teachers, fly-in fly-out workers and professionals.

In recent years, infrastructure has not kept up. In the mornings and afternoons, these hardworking people sit in traffic for 40 to 50 minutes. Mums and dads are leaving home at 7 am to miss the traffic. This is time they do not get to spend with their kids. As I said to the Premier recently, this is capital city traffic, but we choose not to live in a capital city. The detailed planning work for the North Shore Boulevard and Woolcock Street intersection is so important so we get that fixed right.

The Svensson Road upgrade, which will provide another connection point to the Bruce Highway, is equally important. Infrastructure is not concrete and bitumen; it is quality of life, it is time with family and it is safety. When we get these decisions right, parents make it home for dinner, kids spend less time in the backseat of the car and more time at sport—or maybe doing homework—and local businesses can plan with confidence.

As we move further north, we reach the agricultural heartland of Rollingstone, where pineapples are grown, and the Herbert River district—cane and cattle country. People there want to see a strong future for the ag industry. They want to see real diversification opportunities and have confidence in the regulatory settings so they can invest for their own future as well as for their kids.

They want improved flood resilience. This district experienced the worst flooding it has seen since 1967. Locals told me they saw water in places they have never seen it before. They are tough, but they are still doing it tough. Homes and businesses were inundated, including the Ergon Energy substation. That is why completing the stage 1 works of that substation was so important, and I was absolutely honoured to be there last Friday for that announcement. There is more work to be done, and I look forward to continuing to drive it.

The Bruce Highway is the lifeblood of our state, particularly of this region. The resilience of and the safety upgrades to the Gairloch and Ripple Creek section are critical. Everyone who lives in this region knows how often that section is closed due to flooding. As we saw when the Ollera Creek bridge collapsed in the floods earlier this year, more needs to be done for the Bruce through the Hinchinbrook electorate. I intend to fight to ensure we get our fair share.

Further north again is the Cardwell community—a community that not long ago was reeling from inaction on Port Hinchinbrook. I went to Cardwell a few days after I was announced as a candidate. I spoke with local businesses and there was a real sense of despair. One shop had turned over only \$75 for the entire day and they were about to close for the day. To return to Cardwell four weeks later with the Premier and Deputy Premier to announce our fix for Port Hinchinbrook—including dredging the marina and the establishment of the first ever provisional priority development area—and to see that community rediscover a sense of optimism is something that will stay with me forever. It showed me what you can do in this role and in this House when you listen and act.

The farming communities of the Kennedy Valley and the Lower Tully are just as important. Our banana and cattle producers there are world-class. I met the Dickinson family from Dicko's Bananas and toured their farm. It struck me again how vital it is that we keep producing our own food, that we do not burden our farmers and producers with over-the-top regulation and that we fight to ensure we are not undermined by imports that threaten the viability of our existing industries.

Above all, the people of Hinchinbrook deserve to feel safe. Throughout the campaign the community told me they wanted more action on crime. This region bore the brunt of a decade of weak laws. Townsville in particular became ground zero. We cannot go back to where we were 12 to 24 months ago. Take the North Townsville Community Hub, for example. It was broken into six times in two years. This hub runs, amongst other things, community programs, community food programs and free playgroups. When they are broken into these services cease while they clean up, repair and rebuild. Forty per cent of youth crime is being perpetrated by repeat youth offenders out on bail. Bail reform is vitally important to me and our community. The people of Hinchinbrook—and, indeed, the people of this state—deserve to feel safe in their homes, on their streets and in their businesses, and I intend to pursue this on behalf of our community.

Every part of the Hinchinbrook electorate is special to me and every community within it has played its part in the development of our plan. Our aim is simple: to make our community safer, stronger and a better place to live, work and raise a family. I would also like to acknowledge the former member for Hinchinbrook and now Mayor of Townsville, Nick Dametto. His passion for Hinchinbrook, Townsville and North Queensland is undeniable. I look forward to working with him in his new role and also the other mayors across the Hinchinbrook electorate—Cassowary Coast Mayor Teresa Millwood and Hinchinbrook Mayor Ramon Jayo—to deliver for our communities.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank some people. Firstly, to Tamara Shroy and Will Gati: thank you for your incredible effort and support over the last two months. I am not sure we would be here without your hard work. To the LNP organisation—to President Doug Hawkes, State Director Ben Riley, Hinchinbrook Chair Bryce McDonald, the Young LNP, members and volunteers: thank you for your support, advice and energy throughout the campaign. I could not have done it without you.

To my fellow LNP members of parliament—in particular, the members for Mundingburra, Thuringowa and Townsville: thank you for your check-ins, letterbox dropping, doorknocking and everything else in between. I sincerely appreciate it. To the ministers who came north during the campaign, thank you. Sometimes you have to be careful what you wish for. Hinchinbrook has a lot of catching up to do and I intend to keep the invitations coming.

To Senator Susan McDonald, thank you for your unwavering support. To Minister Last, thank you for your support, advice and training over a long period of time. To the Deputy Premier and Treasurer, thank you for your advice, guidance and support. It is much appreciated. To the Premier, David Crisafulli, who I have known for a very long time: his passion for all of Queensland comes as no surprise to me. His work ethic and his desire to leave this state in a better place are qualities I deeply admire.

Most importantly, I want to thank my children and my family. To my kids—Lucy and Tommy, who are 11 and eight—you are my why. You have not seen much of dad over the last eight weeks—not as much as I would like, that’s for sure—but seeing your smiling faces on election night is a moment that will stay with me forever. I love you both dearly.

To Lucy and Tommy’s mum, Cass, thank you for your support during the campaign. You did the heavy lifting at a very busy time of year—end-of-year dance concerts, grand finals, sports awards and award nights—and for that I am truly grateful.

To my partner, Samantha—Sam—you are my rock. As CEO of the WNBL side the Townsville Fire, I have seen how hard you have worked to get this club where it is today. I do not think I have seen anyone more passionate about women’s sport than you, and where you have taken this club is a credit to your drive and leadership. Over the last two months you have also been somewhat of a psychologist for me, so I thank you for that. I could not have done it without you. I would encourage everyone in this House to attend a Townsville Fire match at some point. You will not be disappointed.

**Mr Mander:** Go the Fire!

**Mr CHIESA:** Hear, hear! To Sam’s kids, Ollie and Mati, thank you for your support and for continuing to remind me of everything that is good in this world. To my brothers and sister—Damon, Melissa, Jared and Michael—and their families, and to my extended family and friends: thank you for your love, your patience and your belief in me. Politics is a tough business, and I do not take lightly the sacrifices that those closest to us are asked to make.

In closing, I want to reflect on someone who has had a profound impact on me and on our region—the late Frank Beveridge, the former mayor of the Charters Towers Regional Council and chair of Regional Development Australia Townsville and North West Queensland, whom I had the great privilege of working for for nearly four years. Frank taught me many things, but there are three lessons that I will carry into this place: first, he said always try to simplify the complex; to always value people and relationships above all; and, lastly, when faced with a difficult decision, to always do the right thing. Mr Speaker, I intend to take those lessons with me as I listen to the people of Hinchinbrook, work hard for them and deliver the results they so very much deserve.