




Speech By
Sandy Bolton

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

Record of Proceedings, 8 March 2018

MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (5.32 pm): Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet and pay my respects to elders past, present and future. I would also like to acknowledge and pay my respects to those who have kept this country and its people safe in modern times and those who dedicate their lives to others and making for a better future.

Secondly, please stop for a moment and close your eyes as I would like to share a view. Are your eyes closed? Now, feel the sun's heat on your face, cooled by a breeze that has the scent of salty ocean, sweet tea-tree blossom and tangy eucalypt. Hear the stark cries of a black cockatoo high overhead, backed by cicadas in chorus. Now, open your eyes and see. We are standing on the top of Mount Tinbeerwah where you can see most of the Noosa electorate: to the east, the Noosa River, coastal villages and picturesque beaches, for which my home is so well known; to the west, volcanic cones set in a magical emerald landscape dotted with rural towns, boutique farms and historic cottages; to the north, the Great Sandy National Park and the mythical rainbow sands beyond the lakes where the bull sharks breed; and to the south, the growing urbanisation of the Sunshine Coast and, further still, out of sight, this parliament where we sit today.

Noosa is a unique place, attracting over two million visitors annually, including many of you in this chamber today. Its natural environment, as you know, is renowned for many reasons, including housing over 300 varieties of bird species. The Kabi Kabi or Gubbi Gubbi peoples, who took care of this part of the country for thousands of years, are a very special people. The Noosa people of this modern era are diverse, colourful and welcoming, comprising a broad spectrum of demographics, sectors and needs. They share a special bond through Noosa's historical struggles to protect its greatest asset, which is the natural environment, and, more recently, a struggle to regain their own community identity and regain their own governance. They also share very modern struggles. For 25 years, I have lived in this incredible place. It is my forever home.

Close your eyes again. Let us leave Noosa for a moment and come back to this chamber and to who I am and why I stand here today. Open your eyes. My forebears sailed to Australia on the *Selkirkshire* into Rockhampton in the 1800s. I was born into a long lineage of hard workers—farmers, self-taught creatives and small business owners. They sustained themselves in times of great hardship. They lost daughters to floods and sons and husbands to wars. They survived through being resourceful, enterprising and sharing what little they had—always looking to create a better future. Some were pioneers in part of our North Queensland history. During the 1880s, my great-grandfather, Enos, worked on the Cape York telegraph line, marrying Emma, whose family had settled at Fairview Station where, in a paddock, rests my great-great-grandmother, Jane. How I wish I could have known any of them, as my acquaintance has only been recent through historical research undertaken by others. This is also a part of great hardship—the sad fragmentation of families.

My mother, whom at 89 could not attend today, was industrious and entrepreneurial in business and elsewhere with limited education, and she did so mostly as a sole parent. The networks and financial support we take for granted now were not available then and, as a family, we were well acquainted with shed and caravan living. Generational hardship comes with some stark realities, including the necessity to leave school at year 10 to pay my way. Lack of options and opportunity for further education created the necessity for diversification of skills and a lot of resilience.

By 19, I was managing an historic inn at Windsor, New South Wales, and purchased my first home, paying interest rates of over 20 per cent. At 23, I gave birth to my first child whilst living on a one-million-acre cattle property bordering Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory. Next door was Elsey Station of *We of the Never Never* fame. Author Jeannie Gunn, unbeknown to me until recently, was good friends with my grandmother, Jessie, when they were young women. Bush life is remote, it is harsh and you grow as a person through experiencing firsthand the key elements of sustainability and survival. You become intimate with the real definition of community. It is here I would like to stop—in the bush for a moment.

Close your eyes and feel the searing heat that burns your throat, the dust that clogs your pores, the acrid smell of smoke, the sounds of cattle loading onto trucks, the sense of exhaustion and desperation for rain. Now, open your eyes and think about what community really means to you and to your communities. In the bush, it was and still is about 'we' instead of 'me'. It is about responsibility to self and to others. The sharing of space, of food and of dreams required tolerance. Being resourceful—not wasting anything, including the efforts of people and of time—created sustainability. All is repurposed, reconfigured and retained. There are no labels. All contribute in roles that make for a better community, regardless of age or abilities. There was no need for child care or aged care, parental or sick leave. Everyone was needed, wanted, and had their space and place, and there was great understanding of differing cultures, perspectives and perceptions. This was a defining time in who I was to become, through the knowledge shared with me by women and men of Indigenous and European descent. I learnt about the meaning of 'us' and the importance of contribution that I believe built the strong foundations of Queensland and Australia.

Let us fast forward from the bush. By 1992 the challenges of droughts, floods and schooling brought us to Noosa. Soon after arrival, I became a sole parent and the hardships moved to another reality—juggling children, work and an enduring commitment to community. For these last 25 years, I have worked with individuals, small business and not-for-profit organisations that have struggled to survive. I have watched as unemployment, homelessness and a lack of affordable housing continued to be broadcast as statistics instead of emotional reality. I have listened to the frustration of communities dealing with escalating drug addiction, poor health outcomes, violence and emotional isolation. Politics was never on my radar; however, finding solutions to these issues was. I needed to understand why, despite the prosperity of our state and Australia, our greatest concerns remained unresolved.

In 2004 the drums were beating in Queensland that Noosa might lose its local government. By 2008 Noosa was forcibly amalgamated. It was a shotgun wedding and it was short-lived. In March 2013 the people of Noosa voted overwhelmingly to get back their council. In November that same year I was elected as a councillor and spent two years developing a better understanding of the role of local government in our social and economic realms. In 2016 I contested the mayoralty and was pipped at the post. Since then I have taken the knowledge gained at local government level to work on identifying and connecting the elements needed to deliver positive social, economic and environmental outcomes. Some of these have been through innovative business models and creative social programs. Others have been in the simplicity of developing interdependent partnerships.

Contrary to popular belief, Noosa is not populated with affluent citizens but is a mirror image of most medium sized growing communities. My community has the same socioeconomic problems that are shared by many electorates throughout the state and Australia. Compared to Queensland state averages, Noosa's economy is growing at a slower rate and unemployment is consistently higher. Household income is 15 per cent below the state average while mortgage and rental stress are half as high again. As well, we have a higher number of single parent households compared to the rest of the Sunshine Coast and our population is, on average, much older than in the rest of Queensland and is ageing more rapidly as it is a highly desired retirement destination. Underpinning this is our one-track economy—tourism—with no major employer and little or no buffer built into it for when the Australian dollar soars and our economy recedes. For the 25 years I have lived there, Noosa has strived to diversify its economy. Forward movement has been limited due to a number of challenges including telecommunications.

I believe Noosa's decision to elect an Independent was a result of a community that has suffered, and continues to suffer, the difficulty of a slow-growing local economy and its ramifications, and the frustration of being ignored by those in positions of power who could assist. The message at election time was clear: our communities want greater fairness and access to state resources for developing long-term solutions for real sustainability. They need policies and legislation that support their endeavours. They seek action instead of reaction. They are calling for leaders that demonstrate what our forebears sought and fought for and to be given the opportunity to address their greatest concerns and realise their aspirations. They no longer want to be told, 'That's just how it is.' They want to hear how it can be and what they need to do to get them there.

During the campaign I made a commitment to the people of Noosa that I will fight tenaciously for their interests and that I will be accountable directly to them. That means working towards a political culture that promotes teamwork, respect and empathy to deliver the needed outcomes for Noosa and for the whole of Queensland. I will do whatever it takes to achieve that culture.

There are profound changes occurring in our Australian communities which I have experienced firsthand—changes which we need to better understand in order to address. This requires us to stop for a moment and really listen. I am sure honourable members would agree that our communities are wearying of the bickering, bullying and grubby tactics too often demonstrated in politics across Australia that consume headlines and taxpayer dollars.

It is time to set a better example to our communities, especially to our youngest Australians, that bullying and aggression are not tools of negotiation. If we are a progressive, inclusive, innovative and fair society as we say we are, it is now time to say no to poor behaviour and time wasting in the political realm. We are paid to do a job and we need to spend our time productively.

Our communities are also tired of roadblocks, red tape and a system that seems designed to stifle and block initiative instead of encourage. Let us nurture the possibilities instead of being fearful of change and retreating to the safety of the known. Let us be as innovative and efficient in our processes and culture as we ask of our businesses, our communities and our not-for-profit organisations in order for them to achieve sustainability. We need to lead by example.

Most communities understand there are plenty of things a local MP cannot do alone. They also understand that with a concerted effort from them and their community, and with the support from members of parliament and government, they can make real headway to achieve their goals. This effort has to be encouraged and it has to be organised through visible, energetic and positive leadership by all of us. It requires a new culture in politics, a new way of getting things done.

It requires a return to true community and its elements and bravery by all of us to step outside the box. It requires us to respect our communities and their integrity by giving straight answers to their questions even when that truth may not be what they wish to hear. In order for this new culture of leadership in politics to succeed, we must rise above the corrosive force of silos. We should now be beyond this. Political silos are elitist and separatist and they represent conflict, wasted effort and stagnation. We no longer have time on our side nor endless resources to spend energy in the negative.

When the people of Noosa came together to regain their own local government, they showed they could rise above what separated them to focus on what connected them. It showed that a collective voice is both powerful and motivating, increasing collective responsibility and contribution. My focus is to help drive forward a united and interconnected community, and a state that looks beyond just one issue or protest or political ideology; that seeks knowledge, promotes creative thought and works to demonstrate what can be done versus what cannot; that looks beyond which government is in power and comes together in this parliament to create the outcomes sought by people from across Queensland.

In order to achieve this broader vision, we each also need clarity at a local level to have specific and concrete material objectives for our electorates. For Noosa in this parliament it is to ensure the adequacy of health and aged care and access to this care. The new university hospital 60 minutes away at Kawana is a wonderful asset, but we also need our Noosa Hospital to be a well-equipped facility that has a guarantee of Public Service funding into the foreseeable future to accommodate our ageing population and 2.5 million visitors each year. Accurate allocation of resources requires an audit of the current health needs and capacity of the local healthcare system to cater for them and that future demands can be accommodated. Being a national and international tourism drawcard, Noosa needs the infrastructure to accommodate this.

Beckmans Road, Six Mile Creek and the Cooroy overpass are locations of our historic traffic jams, gridlocks, dangerous intersections and one-lane bridges that flood with even moderate rain, leaving no alternative route, often for days at a time. We need effective solutions, especially with the population to the immediate south and north escalating, increasing the volume of 'daytrippers' to the respite Noosa provides.

All levels of government prioritise education and employment opportunities. There is no greater opportunity than unused facilities that could be repurposed as enterprise and training hubs. I refer here to the former TAFE campus at Tewantin that was closed five years ago. We seek a commitment from government to support Noosa's efforts to buffer against future economic downturns and ensure that school leavers are not lost to our community. This site is a valuable part of this strategy.

The Noosa of today has evolved through decades of astute local environmental policies supported by a community that understands the balance that must be maintained between nature and human use and that its social and economic welfare is reliant on its environmental wellbeing. We have serious challenges confronting our river. Waste disposal, erosion, silting, derelict boats, habitat protection and the enforcement of regulations relating to these continue to be of great concern. Solutions to ensure the environmental integrity of the river need to be developed by the Noosa community and within the complex bureaucracy that presently administers our rivers.

The final matter I wish to touch on is the statewide issue of housing affordability and electricity pricing which are, as elsewhere in Queensland and Australia, major problems for low and single income households who are doing it tough.

Affordable housing is essential for the physical and mental wellbeing of all. There are many smart solutions that do not rely on tax or ratepayer dollars, and the private and community housing sectors have a number of options. I urge the government to recognise various models that have been demonstrated successfully and remove unnecessary regulatory burdens and definitions on community housing providers. No person should be homeless or living under severe duress to put a roof over their and their children's heads in a country of plenty.

Our transition to renewable sources of power needs to be realistic, transparent and affordable, especially for those who are struggling. The complexity of the transition needs to be shared in a manner that our communities can understand and help achieve in order to support. This includes the provision of affordable electric or solar powered cars. There are job and economic opportunities in developing products for low to middle income households and it is time to invest in this space. To resolve many of these issues we need a bipartisan approach.

I stood for election to offer a genuine, community-facing and cohesive way of doing politics. The people of Noosa elected me to this parliament because they believe this is the way forward. I am a conciliator, a mediator, a negotiator—not a warrior. However, I am not so conciliatory that I will see Noosa and other communities across Queensland taken for granted and disrespected by governments. In representing the people of the Noosa electorate strongly and faithfully I will expend whatever energy is needed to protect and enhance, to engage and collaborate and to negotiate outcomes that will build a more cohesive, prosperous and empowered Noosa and Queensland. That is my commitment.

Close your eyes one last time. Smell the rich history embedded in the furniture within this chamber and in the pages of the archives. Hear the voices echoing from the past and those projected back from the future. Can you hear what they are saying? Can you see how our communities and state would look and feel if our greatest issues were resolved? Can you imagine how you would feel if you are the catalyst for the necessary change needed to achieve that? Now open your eyes. As the only independent member of parliament in Queensland I am asking you, my fellow MPs, to join in leading the way in a new style of doing politics.

Let us promote respectful behaviour and be good role models to our communities, especially our youngest Queenslanders. Let us concentrate on what we can do versus pointing out what someone else has not or cannot do. Let us use our energy, networks, knowledge and resources constructively. Let us respect the people of our communities enough to tell them the truth: they can handle it. Let us look beyond the next election in our decision-making and be authentic, decent and genuine in our intent. Let us build trust and respect through being brave and not following convention because it is easier. Let us unite in partnership and a joint commitment to make the 56th Parliament one to be truly remembered. Let us be the change that our people past, present and future want to see. Thank you.