




Speech By
Tony Perrett

MEMBER FOR GYMPIE

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MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Mr PERRETT** (Gympie—LNP) (4.08 pm): I am humbled to be able to deliver my first speech in this chamber. I would like to congratulate the Speaker on his election to this respected high office. As a newly elected member, I look forward to being given guidance and assistance as well as watching and learning from him and my fellow elected colleagues. I would like to reaffirm my allegiance to Her Majesty the Queen, to her representative Governor Paul de Jersey, to this parliament and to the sensible and modest electors of Gympie.

It is fitting to note in the centenary year of the Anzac landings at Gallipoli that the Prime Minister of that time—Andrew Fisher—had cut his teeth in state politics as the member for Gympie. I hope to represent the people of the Gympie electorate with the same vision and enthusiasm that many of my predecessors brought to this parliament. Like many members before me, I am the second generation of my family to have been given the privilege to be elected to this chamber. In 1988 my father was elected to this chamber to represent the seat of Barambah after its longest serving member, Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen.

I would not be here without the support of my local LNP branch members and I thank them for their efforts in assisting me during the recent election. The Gympie electorate, like many across the state, has an extensive number of polling booths which could not be manned without the many helpers and supporters who volunteered their time to assist me and the LNP. In particular, I would like to acknowledge and thank Mr Guy Burnett, as chair of the local state electoral council. His tireless efforts are greatly appreciated and I look forward to his continued support and friendship. I also acknowledge the pivotal role of my campaign manager, Sharon O'Brien. Her extensive knowledge of the electorate, combined with her unwavering commitment to the task, meant a well-coordinated, professional and successful campaign.

Before being elected to this House I spent 11½ enjoyable years as a councillor in local government—firstly on the former Kilkivan Shire Council and then on the newly amalgamated Gympie Regional Council. From my direct experience there is no better way to appreciate what makes an electorate and its residents great. Dealing and interacting with local constituents on a regular basis is certainly a great privilege.

I also take this opportunity to publicly acknowledge a great mentor of mine during my time in local government—the late Ron Dyne, former mayor of the Kilkivan Shire Council and the Gympie Regional Council. Ron lost his battle with cancer earlier this year, and I publicly recognise his exceptional personal qualities of leadership and courage. For every day that he served as mayor I served as his deputy. We developed a strong partnership where we learnt to work collectively to achieve positive outcomes for our region. He is survived by his loving wife, Dulcie, son Gavin and daughter Michelle.

All members elected to this House know the personal sacrifice we make when committing to a life in the public eye. Without the ongoing support of family and friends, this role would be far less

rewarding and enjoyable. I would not be here without the support of my wife, Michele, who is in the gallery today, and my two wonderful daughters, Stephanie and Josie. Their dedicated commitment to aid and assist me in my political endeavours means that they must take greater responsibility for our family grazing operation. I am truly thankful for their ongoing love and support.

I am a person whose beliefs have been developed around Christian and robust family values. I am not about fixing things that are not broken; I am about empowering people to help themselves. I value simple plain talking, rolling up your sleeves and getting stuck in. I have a strong rural background and was born and educated in Kingaroy. As a 19-year-old I joined the Kingaroy Young Nationals in 1988. As an active branch member, I was able to interact and learn from my political mentors, Sir Joh and Lady Flo Bjelke-Petersen, and learnt from them the importance of public service.

In 1997, I moved with my family to Kilkivan and purchased a 15,000-acre grazing property at the headwaters of Boonara Creek. Six years later in 2003 I was appointed to the Kilkivan Shire Council to fill a vacancy, was re-elected in 2004 and then appointed deputy mayor. I was then elected to the newly amalgamated Gympie Regional Council in 2008 and appointed deputy mayor and chairman of the Community Services and Economic Development Committee. I was re-elected in 2012, once again appointed deputy mayor and held the portfolio responsibility of governance, finance and economic development.

My political teeth have been cut across many battles and against many political opponents. There is none greater than in 2006 when the Beattie Labor government set about terminating a grazing lease which I legitimately purchased in 1997. An alliance between Labor and the Greens saw an out-of-control Environmental Protection Agency attempt to remove us from our land which has been sustainably grazed for more than 100 years. The resulting Supreme Court action, to protect and secure our property rights and financial interests, taught me many valuable political lessons. This single action demonstrates what can happen when political minorities gain influence over the common good of individuals and families.

The Gympie electorate is home to 49,000 people spread across almost 3,400 square kilometres. It is centred on Gympie city, with all its wonderful heritage and rich history of gold mining, which is displayed in the Gympie Gold Mining and Historical Museum. In fact, Queensland was bankrupt when James Nash discovered gold in 1867 and Gympie became 'the town that saved Queensland'. It includes the fishing and camping destinations of Rainbow Beach—the natural gateway to Fraser Island—Cooloola Cove and Tin Can Bay, which offer wonderful tourist, business and lifestyle opportunities.

The rich, fertile and picturesque Mary Valley provides agricultural opportunities and primary industries that are the cornerstone of our region's economic growth. The timber and seafood industries remain key ingredients to the ongoing economic viability of the region, and Cooran and Pomona offer great coastal hinterland living. The region supports a lifestyle where the 1,000-square-metre block reigns, where kids can kick a football, housing is affordable and parents get involved in community activities, where volunteering is valued and people are welcoming and resilient.

Gympie is a major contributor to the Queensland economy with an estimated gross regional product in the 2013-14 financial year of \$2 billion. Members of this chamber may be surprised to learn that manufacturing is the largest contributor, representing 10.5 per cent of Gympie's total gross regional product, followed by construction at 10.4 per cent and the agricultural, forestry and fishing industries at 9.1 per cent.

Some of Australia's market leaders in manufacturing industries are in Gympie, employing 1,706 people or 12.1 per cent of employed people in our region. Multinational companies, major exporters and locally owned and established manufacturers produce goods and services including heavy equipment for the mining, agricultural and transport industries; foodstuffs; and major timber processing and value added products.

The wide range of products grown and produced throughout the electorate includes some of Queensland's outstanding food processors who provide valuable employment and industry development opportunities. There are growers of export quality beef; dairy farms producing some wonderful dairy products; seafood sourced in the pristine waters of the Great Sandy Straits and adjacent waters; timber and forestry products; citrus, ginger, avocado, macadamia, olive and small crop growers; and growers of organic fruit and vegetables.

Gympie has more than 4,200 small businesses, making it the largest employer group in the region. As a small business operator, I am acutely aware of how quickly pointless bureaucratic and legislative decisions can have a detrimental effect on the operation of a business. Small business has

nowhere to go when fixed costs rise and regulations and rules become more burdensome. Communities such as mine suffer because they have to close their doors or lay off workers.

Mr Deputy Speaker Ryan, I am sure that you, like many other Queenslanders, have enjoyed dining on a fine juicy piece of steak. It is more than likely that you were enjoying a piece of Nolan's prime selection steak, which is distributed throughout the restaurant and Queensland domestic market. Nolan Meats is Gympie's largest private employer and has operated since 1958. As a wholly Australian, family owned company, it services not only the Australian market but also international markets. It exports to Brunei, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, the Middle East, Taiwan and the USA. In 2011 it was awarded the prestigious Premier of Queensland Exporter of the Year.

As members enjoy their daily cup of coffee they should reflect that right here in Queensland, in the Gympie electorate, Nestle operates a coffee processing plant that employs more than 200 people. It produces International Roast and Nescafe instant coffee, as well as Andronicus roasted and ground coffee. In fact, the Gympie factory produces Australia's entire needs for International Roast and Andronicus roast coffee.

Our rich history of associated forestry activities is woven into the fabric of the local community and preserved on display at the Gympie Woodworks Museum. Companies such as Carter Holt Harvey and Laminex grow, tend and harvest timber from plantations and manufacture products. Gympie is the centre of laminated building board operations for Laminex—the world's biggest maker of MDF. It is home to one of Laminex's four manufacturing plants across Australia.

The list goes on. Gympie is home to Performax, which is Australia's leading and largest importer, converter and retailer of American cars and pick-ups. In my electorate we have Page Furnishers in Pomona which is one of Queensland's largest manufacturers and suppliers of educational furniture—a major supplier to local councils, state government departments, businesses and private schools with outdoor furniture. It also produces timber and steel products for correctional facilities, the Department of Defence, healthcare services, hospitality and mining industries.

As someone who comes from outside the narrow focus of South-East Queensland, I thank the previous LNP government for establishing the Queensland Plan—a 30-year vision to grow and develop many aspects of what is good about our state. The plan aims to grow regional Queensland and identifies that only through decentralisation and empowering and growing regional communities we can provide the best opportunities for families, businesses, industries and workers to thrive. It is a forward-thinking document operating outside the confines of the three-year political cycle. It lays the legitimate groundwork for making this state ready for the future, for my children and for future generations. It offers a once-in-a-generation opportunity to a future full of possibility.

I note that an adviser to former Labor governments, Mike Kaiser, earlier this year praised it and recommended that the Queensland government keep the plan. The plan sets a road map for growth and prosperity, and I want Gympie to play its role in achieving this shared vision. The plan has many features which offer enormous opportunity for the Gympie region. I look no further than to my own daughter through education—the very first vision in this plan. She is able to study locally for a Bachelor of Commerce at the Gympie campus of the University of the Sunshine Coast, is able to live at home and has gained part-time employment at a local accountancy firm. This very example of providing opportunities for our young people to live, study and work locally demonstrates how we must grow into the future.

Today about two-thirds of Queensland's 4.6 million people live in South-East Queensland. Travelling north, Gympie is the first region outside the official SEQ boundary. The plans target to double the population living in rural and regional Queensland by 2044, provides an enormous opportunity for us to gain an equal or greater share of the growth. Most importantly, the growth must be linked to sustainability, economic prosperity and jobs.

The Gympie electorate has to harness infrastructure spends which provide the economic impetus for private business and individuals to borrow and invest. The state has to provide a healthy economic and work environment and reduce overregulation through kneejerk green and red tape which drives people from operating businesses. Government investment and support is needed for infrastructure and projects which will provide an environment for people to live and invest locally.

Gympie has a number of issues which need addressing. I look forward to this government supporting commitments such as the fast-tracking of stage C four-laning of the Bruce Highway upgrade. I welcome the minister's recent assurance to endorse the former LNP government's committed contribution of \$125 million, or 20 per cent, to upgrade the 8.4-kilometre stretch of the Bruce Highway. The project is jointly funded with the federal government, which is committing \$500 million. Bringing the section C upgrade forward means that families and local industries will

benefit from a safer and quicker drive on this notorious stretch. I look forward to the government committing to further progress the highway's upgrade with planning for stage D. Upgrading the Bruce Highway benefits all Queenslanders. The upgrades have been built above the Q100 flood levels to make managing floods in and around Gympie easier. It is a vital transport link to North Queensland, and in times of natural disaster the Bruce Highway around Gympie should be immune to isolation.

The Tin Can Bay foreshore and the Cooloola Coast are gradually being eroded and are in pressing need of stabilisation and restoration. If works do not take place, the footpath will disappear into the water. The Gympie Regional Council urgently needs an injection of \$1 million to undertake these works, and I will be seeking a commitment from the government to support this much needed project.

The electorate is keen to see the release of the long overdue Gympie Hospital master plan. It was due in February this year and will address the future of primary health services and reduce patient travel to Brisbane for treatment. I am looking forward to its release so we can get a firm direction to upgrade the facility to meet community expectations. A perfect fit for the Gympie region's growth and development are industries based around agriculture and manufacturing production. That is why we are excited with Gina Rinehart's proposed Hope Dairies project in which she intends to invest up to \$500 million to produce infant milk formula for China. The project will include everything from the production of milk to its processing, canning, exporting and marketing. As Australia's biggest proposed dairy operation, Hope Dairies aims to acquire 5,000 hectares of farmland to produce milk and will establish a processing plant in the Mary Valley.

As mentioned earlier, nurturing local educational opportunities with a full range of opportunities from prep to university is an exciting development for the region. Gympie is home to 29 schools. I am encouraged that in the last three years much of the school maintenance backlog was cleared, making them more conducive to learning. In 2013 the University of the Sunshine Coast established a campus in town with 45 students. Demonstrating the critical need for a local tertiary facility, this year's intake expanded to 217 students.

Education qualification levels in Gympie are among the lowest in Queensland, with only 13.5 per cent having a bachelor degree compared to 21.6 per cent in the state. With the local unemployment rate 2.1 per cent above the state average, USC provides more opportunities for local students and mature age adults to improve their learning outcomes and will help to address their ability to secure fulfilling careers. Almost 70 per cent of the students at the Gympie campus are mature aged, demonstrating that the previous lack of a local higher education facility had delayed their chances of further education. I look forward to the university expanding its presence in Gympie, and I encourage the government to support it.

The coastal link road from Noosa to Tin Can Bay Road needs developing to enhance the growth of the area as a natural tourism destination. This region is fast becoming a dedicated destination for those wanting a natural experience either from the unspoiled beauty of the Cooloola national park, fishing and boating in the protected waters of Great Sandy Strait, or recreational activities such as four-wheel driving and camping at Rainbow Beach.

Another important attraction in the region is the Apex Gympie Music Muster, which is in its 34th consecutive year and is a drawcard for music lovers from throughout Australia. As the home of the Australian Institute of Country Music, it nurtures young talent such as local girl Caitlyn Shadbolt, who was a finalist in *The X Factor* in 2014.

Water security within the next 10 years looms large on the horizon for Gympie. Gympie needs to have surety of water security for urban, business and industry development. The future growth of the region depends on forward planning and includes options such as raising the wall of Borumba dam. Being an elected representative is about providing leadership, but in so doing it requires an attitude that brings people together for a common result. It will require my regular ongoing support and advice, and also that of my parliamentary colleagues and my community.

My established links to business and the community are strong, and I pledge to use these well-built foundations to work closely with our federal and local government representatives to build a better Gympie. I am humbled to be standing here in this chamber, and I again thank the electors of Gympie for putting their trust in me.