




Speech by

Hon. David Crisafulli

MEMBER FOR MUNDINGBURRA

Hansard Thursday, 17 May 2012

MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Hon. DF CRISAFULLI** (Mundingburra—LNP) (Minister for Local Government) (10.52 am): Madam Speaker, I thank Her Excellency the Governor for the speech she has delivered to parliament. My presence in this place is the result of many and varied contributions over the years. I want to start today by placing on record my thanks to some of those people. I am here because a middle-age Italian man made a decision in 1960 to head to North Queensland, leaving behind his loving family for a year, to work in a field cutting cane. I am here because a first-generation Australian and his young migrant bride made countless sacrifices to educate a bright young girl who would later become my mother. And I am here because of the incredible support of my wife, Tegan, and children Georgia and Nicola, who have always supported their dad. Tegan did not fall in love with a journalist, a councillor or a member of parliament; she married her high school sweetheart, and she has stuck by me through a series of demanding careers. Every day I remind myself how fortunate I am.

But I am also here for other reasons. I am here because of a strong country upbringing which taught me that people matter. I am here because of the discipline I received at Canossa Primary School and Gilroy Santa Maria College in my home town of Ingham. I am here because of the skills I learned working in the media—an often criticised but valuable pillar in our great democracy. I am here because of the baptism of fire I received as the first non-Labor councillor to walk onto the floor of the Townsville City Council chambers in nearly half a decade. The dark years of waking up to yet another political threat dressed up in a legal letter, in a cauldron where the only kind of privilege one is afforded is iced water, steel you for any challenge that can come your way. I learned a thing or two about politics in this arena, but I fall back on a principle that I was brought up with: do as you would be done by. I can assure the honourable members opposite that they will not be subjected to the treatment that I received when I was on the other side of a large majority.

I am here because of the opportunity I had to make a contribution to the growth of my city as deputy mayor. I am proud of what I achieved, especially in my role in overseeing Townsville's CBD renewal process, but I am equally pleased to have been involved in the establishment of parks in the part of the city that now makes up the electorate that I represent.

But there is one overriding reason I am here: I have been given this opportunity because of the people of Mundingburra. While I was humbled to be part of a team offering real change and a fresh start, I hope they also saw in me someone willing to have a crack for them. In Cranbrook and Douglas, it was many of the same faces that afforded me a chance as a very young man to represent them on the council over eight years ago. In suburbs like Aitkenvale, Annandale, Gulliver, Heatley, Kirwan, Mundingburra, Rosslea and Vincent, they supported me again after helping me top the poll in 2008 ahead of 48 other candidates in the local government elections.

As much as each member in this place would like to think their election is the most important in their seat's history, in Mundingburra I cannot for one moment pretend that to be the case. In 1996 it was the seat that changed government when a by-election was called after the Court of Disputed Returns overturned a 16-vote win by incumbent Ken Davies over his Liberal challenger, Frank Tanti. The Labor Party changed candidates to the then Mayor Tony Mooney, Mr Davies ran as an Independent, and after what was the

most watched by-election in this state's history the government of Wayne Goss was brought down. I cannot even pretend to be the most colourful member for Mundingburra. That honour goes to Tom Aikens: a one-time hard-drinking larrikin who was known for riding his bicycle throughout the electorate.

The seat of Mundingburra provides the greatest snapshot of life in Townsville. There are some magnificent Queenslanders, predominantly in the suburb that bears the seat's name. Nearby Vincent was developed in the late 1960s to cater for the newly arrived troops after the construction of Lavarack Barracks. Heatley, Gulliver and Kirwan have been created over the years by a string of local developers. Annandale, a magnificent suburb started in the late 1970s, still offers some of the city's finest dwellings. Next door, a part of Douglas was developed around the same time when it was used as a land ballot by the Townsville council exclusively for first home owners while in more recent times a section developed by Delfin, known as Riverside Gardens, has raised the bar for development in our city since the late 1990s. The town centre is based around Aitkenvale, which will house the city's first Myer department store. Aitkenvale itself is a great snapshot of the old and the new, with many quarter-acre blocks as well as units and town houses.

The greatest feature of the electorate is the mighty Ross River. It is an incredible resource used for rowing, skiing, swimming and fishing, but for most it is the backdrop for our morning and afternoon walks. The three weirs all touch into the electorate: Black Weir into Douglas, Gleeson's between Cranbrook and Douglas, and Aplin's between Mundingburra and Annandale. I have moved seven times since first coming to Townsville in the mid-1990s for university, but I have never once resided outside of the electorate. It is where we shop, it is where our kids go to school and it is where we wish to stay.

I know the territory well and I believe that I have a handle on what local residents want from this government. First, they are proud that the hospital is located in Douglas, but they want a medical institution that is as highly regarded as the people who work in it. The local hospital boards will be a breath of fresh air. The progress of the paediatric intensive care unit under the watch of the new Minister for Health, the member for Southern Downs, is warmly welcomed. I am proud of the role that I played in securing this funding and I thank the member for Caloundra for his strong advocacy when he was shadow health minister.

My constituents want better roads. People in Townsville love the fact that the city is coming of age and is growing, but that needs to be growth on our terms. Nothing will give me more pleasure than to be able to deliver funding after this year's budget to the Townsville City Council to upgrade Blakey's Crossing—a project that has been caught in the middle of political games for far too long. But there are many other key intersections that will need upgrading during my time in this place and as the local member I will pursue those projects with vigour.

These are just two of the local issues I campaigned on, but there was a bigger story than those who supported me locally. There were people who made a decision to vote against the Labor Party for not just the first time in their lives, but for the first time in three generations of their family—people like Rod who I met doorknocking in Vincent. To Rod and people like him I send a personal message: we will not let you down. I aim to be part of a government that grows the economic pie so all can enjoy it. We will not abandon our traditional supporter base of business and agriculture, but we will understand that the role of the worker is paramount to a strong economy. We will also be a government that does as it says before and after elections. I hope our record in marching towards delivering our commitments in the first 100 days of office is proof of this.

While I feel comfortable serving as an elected official, I am not a political apparatchik. I did not grow up dreaming of being a politician and I never got involved in university politics. As a young journalist, politics regularly left me more disillusioned than inspired. My palate was whet by a great man—a great Queensland—by the name of Ian Macdonald who took a chance on a young journalist who was working in a television station and was looking for a new challenge. It was Senator Macdonald who encouraged me to run for council—a decision that would ultimately cost him a staff member. But in the world of egos and agendas that exist in Canberra, Ian Macdonald has always been a man who has recognised the greater good. Perhaps that is due to his strong country values. Perhaps he is someone who can see the bigger picture. I would like to think it was the fact that he started his time in elected office in local government, something I will expand upon in a moment.

I ran for state parliament for two reasons. First, I have a passion to see things happen in my part of the state. For too long my city has given more than it has got in return. In a city where, as a result of its diverse economy and a will by its business community to make things happen, governments have had the ability to turn a blind eye, I am keen to see the 'second capital' rhetoric evolve into something meaningful and for Townsville to become the regional powerhouse to drive this state for a generation. But I also made my decision to run because of an assault on local government—the level of government not only closest to the people but the one that has the greatest impact on their lives. As strange as this may sound to those who live, eat and breathe state and federal politics, I would have been just as happy to have continued to serve my community as a councillor in Townsville. There is no greater honour than for someone to be

chosen from their community to represent it. To the 73 mayors and 488 councillors across this state, I salute you.

I made my decision to enter this place to help a level of government that has been battered and bruised, a level of government that has increasingly become a delivery agent for failed state policies, a level of government where individual decision making has been taken away in favour of a centralist approach. In principle, I think local decision making is better, especially in such a large and decentralised state as ours. Faced with a choice between a decision by locals or one out of George Street, I would generally choose the one made by council. The forced amalgamations were an example of a government that was fighting a crusade against local councils. There were amalgamations which needed to occur, but for local councils to have a gun held to their heads smacked of a big brother attitude. While it was done under the pretext of financial stability, in some mergers this characteristic ran a distant second to an attack on the people and the communities that the Labor government had seen as a thorn in its side. In many cases what was a genuine attempt by mayors and councillors to fight for their community was portrayed as a political attack.

Perhaps it is youthful exuberance, perhaps a strong admiration for councils, but it remains my view that 99 per cent of people who represent the councils outside of our state's capital leave their party political allegiances at the door. It is a place where ideology runs second to results. Unlike the recent string of local government ministers, I believe that great people with varying political views make region-shaping contributions on the floors of local council chambers. I look forward to working as much with Paul Pisasale and Margaret Strelow as I do with John Brent and Bob Manning. To every council across the state, but especially at home in Townsville, a new relationship is underway.

Can I also briefly pay tribute to Graham Quirk on his resounding win at City Hall. While I have touched on my thoughts about politics at a local government level, when that council has a population nearly twice the size of Tasmania and a budget of \$3 billion, a different type of governance structure is needed. He has been given a strong mandate and I intend to work with him to provide the powers he needs to drive his city forward.

May I also thank personally the man he succeeded, now our Premier. The dignity the member for Ashgrove and his family displayed during the most vile campaign we have seen has been justly rewarded by the decision of the Queensland people. While each member understands the importance that his drive and leadership played in our electoral success, I have an extra reason to be grateful—for being made Minister for Local Government. To become a cabinet minister is a privilege few Queenslanders are ever afforded and to be one of only a handful to do so on day one is a huge responsibility and honour. But while I intend to pour every drop of energy into working with local government and addressing the challenges that lie ahead, faced with a choice between being remembered as a good minister or as a strong local member, I will always choose first to serve the people of Mundingburra. With that in mind, I pay tribute to the former member for the seat, the Hon. Lindy Nelson-Carr. While I will let others commentate on her achievements in this place, she left George Street after 14 years of service with her dignity intact. I offer her my best wishes for her retirement.

Can I also thank a great North Queensland, former Townsville mayor, Les Tyrell, on his guidance in my time with council and wish him well in the years ahead. To my campaign team, thank you for giving so much of your time to secure a fantastic result. To Peter Lindsay, a great friend, sounding board and the man I describe as the best and possibly most persistent local member to have graced federal parliament, thank you for your guidance. If anyone knows what it takes to win elections it is him. While I will not name all of those who gave their time, I want to especially thank Michelle Gillum, my former PA as deputy mayor, who has made the transition to the Mundingburra electorate office. To have someone who genuinely cares about the local area and local residents is a great asset. To my neighbouring seat holders, the member for Burdekin and the member for Hinchinbrook, I acknowledge the great contributions you have already made in this place. As to the new members for Townsville and Thuringowa, the quality of men you both are leaves me in no doubt the size of contribution you will both make to our great region.

Madam Speaker, may I take this opportunity of congratulating you on your election to the Speaker's chair. As the first woman to hold the office since responsible government, I am sure you will not only conduct proceedings fairly but also, importantly, inspire more women to seek elected office. As I enter a new chapter of my life, but more importantly a new chapter for North Queensland, I want to outline a few themes that will guide me. I am the product of two people who believe in the value of hard work. My mother, along with my sister Belinda, run a small retail business in Ingham. My father, a migrant educated to just grade 8, has built a large and successful cane farm on the back of blisters, tenacity and an appetite for risk. My friends, many of whom have been a part of my life throughout school and my time at James Cook University, have always kept me balanced. Time and again they lined my electoral booths handing out how-to-vote cards. Most of them have no political leanings at all, but have done it to help a mate.

It has been all these relationships which have made me who I am: a proud yet progressive regional Queenslander who believes the greatest gift a government can give its people is not to interfere. While I recognise there are some things that only government can do, in our thirst to control every aspect of people's lives we have lost sight of the fact that, if something can be delivered by the private sector, on most occasions it will be done more efficiently and effectively than by government. Faced with a choice between restrictive regulation and accepting that an open market will produce errors but more good will be done than harm, I choose private enterprise. I have watched this House in horror in recent years where those in power have thought that their level of empathy should be judged by finding another way to transfer money from one group to another. I do not own a 'Save the Whale' T-shirt and I did not buy a Kony 2012 wristband, but I would like to think my sense of real social justice is as strong as anyone's. But it is social justice where those who cannot look after themselves are given a helping hand and those who fall on tough times are given a hand up. However, I do not believe in constantly taking away pieces of the pie from one group to give to another in order to convince the social critics we are governing for everyone. If you continue to do that, eventually the baker picks up his apron and goes and bakes elsewhere. I believe in growing the pie, ensuring everyone can share in a strong economy, but making sure those who put in the most effort are entitled to enjoy the fruits of this success. This effort might be measured by a father's long nights in a lonely office or it might be seen in a small donga in a mining camp while your husband and child await day 14 to roll around to see mum. Whatever form it takes, it must come with reward.

I will finish where I started, by thanking my friends and family for getting me here today. I intend to leave this place proud of the contribution I make. But this North Queensland boy will never forget where it is he has come from. I will work tirelessly to ensure the things that government need to do are done well. But I will do it always with the understanding that the role this place plays in people's lives is not as life or death as its inhabitants often think it is. Faced with a choice of whether the great contributions to this state have been in workplaces across Queensland or in George Street, Brisbane, it is with pride that I choose the contribution of quiet, hardworking and family-loving Australians like that deceased migrant cane farmer. I thank the House.