




Speech By
Les Walker

MEMBER FOR MUNDINGBURRA

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INAUGURAL SPEECH

 **Mr WALKER** (Mundingburra—ALP) (12.22 pm): Mr Speaker, may I extend to you my sincere congratulations for your successful re-election as Speaker of the House. As mentioned previously, back-to-back terms for a Speaker of the House have not occurred for many years, which just shows the high regard that is held for your dedication and diligence to the role of Speaker. You have demonstrated time and again that you will preside over the deliberations in this chamber with experience, much wisdom and respect for the time-honoured conventions that have served this parliament well in the past.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the Jagera and Turrbal people, the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today, and pay my respects to their elders past and present. I also extend respect to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here today. I also acknowledge the traditional owners of the land that I represent in Mundingburra—the Bindal and Wulgurukaba people.

I thought I should start with a brief history of the seat of Mundingburra. The word comes from the Aboriginal word meaning ‘of the water’. Mundingburra the suburb was originally in the shire of Thuringowa and later became a suburb of Townsville. The seat of Mundingburra was originally named Townsville South in 1959 until its dissolution in 1986 when it became Townsville East. Townsville East was later abolished in 1991 and was divided between the seat of Burdekin and the new seat of Mundingburra that it is today.

The seat of Mundingburra is a very diverse and important part of Queensland and Australia. It is the home of Lavarack Barracks, the largest military base in the nation. I would like to thank all of our amazing defence personnel who have served our country each and every day. They have also played a vital role during our battle against COVID-19—and for that our nation thanks you. Mundingburra also has the largest hospital in Northern Australia, the Townsville University Hospital—a further shout-out to our dedicated health professionals who have worked tirelessly during this pandemic to keep Queenslanders safe and also those right across the country. As a father of a nurse, I know how big the sacrifices many of you make are to keep our community healthy.

There is a zinc refinery, Sun Metals, currently going through a major expansion to provide more jobs for the region and to grow our local economy. I also mention our copper refinery, which is also a major employer in the community. James Cook University is one of the world’s leading educational institutions for marine studies. We have 20 public and private schools—and a big shout-out to the recent graduates of year 12 who have gone through a tough time and have completed their secondary schooling.

We also have the Murray Sporting Complex, which is the home of community sports for the region, and Townsville stadium, which is the home of the Women’s National Basketball League three-times national champions, the Townsville Fire. It is important to note that Townsville will host 32 games in total for this altered WNBL season, providing a much welcomed boost to our local economy. Thank you, Premier, for helping to secure that for the region. We also have the Townsville Turf Club,

which is going through a major rebuild due to the monsoon event of 2019 and was heavily supported by the Palaszczuk government. Without your support, this club would have found it very difficult to get back on its feet.

I must acknowledge in the previous term of the Palaszczuk-led government that a commitment was made to fund stage 1 of the Haughton pipeline to provide water security for the people of Townsville. This is being delivered in partnership with the Townsville City Council and has created hundreds of jobs for the region—which goes to answer a previous question today. In the past year of that term, a further commitment was made to wholly fund construction of stage 2 of the Haughton pipeline. This was a fantastic announcement—one of vision and true leadership by the Palaszczuk government. This is a nation-building project, one that demonstrates confidence and provides jobs and more opportunity for the region to grow and attract more investment. It is a shame there are not more in the House to listen. That is why I joined the Palaszczuk team—because of this forward-thinking and visionary leadership. I now look forward to seeing this project completed for the people of Townsville.

A big congratulations goes to all who have been elected to the 57th Parliament—the first four-year term in our state's history. It goes without saying that, during such testing times around the globe, we all have an important role to play in this place. If there is one thing we all know, it is that Queenslanders come together when times get tough. In my home town of Townsville, we all came together after the devastating monsoon event in 2019. Now right across Queensland we have stood united during the battle against COVID-19. I could not be prouder to call Queensland my home, and I am incredibly honoured by the faith that the people of Mundingburra have given me to represent them in this the 57th Queensland parliament. I will work tirelessly to return that trust you have shown me.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the residents of division 10 of Townsville for their support during my 16 years as a city councillor and four years as your deputy mayor. We achieved a lot together as one community and for that I thank you. I enjoyed every moment in my previous role, but I eagerly await the next chapter representing our community across Mundingburra. With the support of my fellow members Minister Scott Stewart and Aaron Harper, we will fight every day to bring a brighter future for the community of Townsville.

I have managed and been involved in many election campaigns over many years. This campaign was something special and what an effort by our great team of volunteers: a five-week campaign spearheaded by my son, Kyle, a campaign I will not forget for some time. The reason I will not forget it in a hurry—besides the sore feet, aching body and lack of sleep—is that I had a team of volunteers that were second to none. I thank them sincerely from the bottom of my heart: my wife, Kaylene; Chantelle, my daughter; David A; Jane; David B; Ellie; Sam; Finn; Luke; Nathan; Oliver; Hannah; Norma; Michelle; Greg; Liam; Ben; Joe; Monique; and, of course, Kyle. These are the people who backed me every single day, making thousands of phone calls, doorknocking thousands of homes—actually more than 5,000 homes in five weeks—letterboxing brochures and doing high-vis through the streets of the electorate of Mundingburra, waving to residents each and every morning on their commute to work. We also had 100 polling booth workers who spent many hours over the two weeks of pre-poll and the final polling day across the electorate of Mundingburra. I sincerely thank you as well. This win is for each and every one of you. Without you this would not have been possible.

A special thank you also goes to my former members for Mundingburra, Ms Coralee O'Rourke, Ms Lindy Nelson-Carr and the Hon. Mike Reynolds, for their support and work across the Mundingburra polling booths and their mentorship during this campaign. I must also acknowledge the great work the former minister and member for Mundingburra, Coralee O'Rourke, has done not only for Mundingburra and Townsville but also for the whole state. One of her achievements that must be mentioned is Oasis—this is critical—the first one of its kind in Australia. It will be one of at least six in Australia and will help our former defence personnel transition into civilian life with IT support, training, counselling, employment and workspace. I make special mention of Lieutenant General John Caligari (Retd) for his fierce advocacy and dedication in this space. It will be a vital facility for many services and will be a model for the whole nation to be proud of. I say thank you to Coralee.

This is a project I have been proud to be involved in as the local councillor and an advisory member. Now as the new member for Mundingburra and a member of the Palaszczuk government, I look forward to completing this vital project and continuing this work with Lieutenant General John Caligari retd and the Oasis team to make sure this facility is a great success. In addition to this, there is the new Townsville Women's Centre, which is a much welcomed new facility for the amazing team who provide that service. Congratulations to Coralee O'Rourke. There is no doubt I have big shoes to fill. A lot has been achieved. However, there is so much more to be done and I am up to the task. I will be the voice for the people of Mundingburra each and every day.

In closing, I would like to thank my beautiful parents, Les and Dorothy, for their love and support and making me the person I am today. You made many sacrifices for our family growing up and to this day continue to provide me with love and support during the most testing times.

To my beautiful wife, Kaylene, you have been by my side through many, many campaigns over the years. Crazy, I know, but you will drag me everywhere and push me to achieve more and more for the community each day. I love you.

To Chantelle, my daughter, your dedication to the community in your role as an ICU nurse is so amazing. You are such a beautiful person inside and out. You are caring, compassionate and kind. Our state is a better place for the care you provide in your role in our community.

Of course, Kyle, you worked tirelessly over that five weeks to push me to achieve things I did not think were possible. You were there from the start to the finish and did not miss a single doorknock, phone bank or early morning high-vis session. This moment here right now simply would not have been possible without you.

To my family, thank you for your unconditional love, support and endless help and belief in me. This victory is for you. Thank you, Mr Speaker. I look forward to these next four years representing our community of Mundingburra and using less tissues. I am going to buy shares in the company. I commend the motion to the House.