




Speech By  
**Nicholas Dametto**

**MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK**

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### MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Mr DAMETTO** (Hinchinbrook—KAP) (5.19 pm): I am greatly humbled to be able to deliver my first speech having been elected by the people of Hinchinbrook to represent them in the Legislative Assembly of the 56th Parliament. Where I come from we consider it God's country—from the cane fields that stretch along the mighty Herbert River to the grandness of Hinchinbrook Island, Australia's largest island national park. This place is special in so many ways. Our region captures dry cattle country and extends from the Wet Tropics to the Great Barrier Reef. You will not find a more diverse landscape. I believe this makes the electorate arguably the best place in the world to live.

As a born and bred North Queenslander, I might be a little biased: I know from my travels that I would not want to call any other place home. We live in Hinchinbrook because we love the North Queensland lifestyle. We ride motorbikes, we go four-wheel driving, we enjoy fishing and camping and we like to hunt and shoot rifles. North Queenslanders love their footy and we choose to spend our days in the outdoors. Unfortunately, our way of life has been under fire for too long. I will fight to ensure our way of life is protected and, in some cases, reinstated.

Hinchinbrook has recently experienced a boundary change due to the electoral redistribution which has seen the dynamics of the electorate change significantly. For the first time the seat takes Hinchinbrook—and the Katter's Australian Party—into dense metropolitan Queensland. The electorate includes the Hinchinbrook Shire Council and the Cassowary Coast Regional Council to the north and Townsville City Council to the south. From Lower Tully to the Bohle River, the electorate spans 205 kilometre from top to bottom, with 33,000 people calling Hinchinbrook home.

More than 50 years ago Australian author Donald Horne wrote a book called *The Lucky Country*. That phrase has become such a part of Aussie vernacular that it is hard to believe it has not been around forever. In the 1960s, my nonno—that is Italian for grandfather—was making his way to Australia, escaping the ruins of war-torn Italy in the hope of a better life in the Lucky Country. My nonno talked to me a lot about the Lucky Country—the place he migrated to and prospered in, unlike the book. His version was incredibly different from the country Horne was thinking about when he wrote his book. The original term, the 'Lucky Country', was not a compliment. In his book, Horne wrote—

Australia is a lucky country run mainly by second rate people who share its luck. It lives on other people's ideas, and, although it's ordinary people are adaptable, most of its leaders (in all fields) so lack curiosity about the events that surround them that they are often taken by surprise.

It was a major dis of Australia, its people, and especially its leaders. In typical Aussie fashion, we took Horne's phrase as a compliment.

My nonno taught me that we lived in a place where if you worked hard, you would get ahead. As the years rolled on, Australia began to change and so did my nonno's belief in the Lucky Country. As he would often say, 'God help Australia.' I am determined to hold on to my nonno's original version and see to doing my part to restore the ideal of the Lucky Country, but I am concerned, as Horne suggested, that our leaders are not leading us in the right direction. That is why I stood with Katter's Australian

Party to fight to become the member for Hinchinbrook. I am worried that, unless we implement real change, our proud version of the Lucky Country will be a story my great-grandchildren will barely believe.

I remember not so long ago a time when you could get ahead on hard work alone. Those days are becoming a distant memory. Now, mums and dads work 50 hours each a week just to pay the mortgage, while daycare centres raise their kids. In some cases the system is so broken that some mothers and fathers are forced to give up work because the daycare costs outweigh their wages. A family working this hard should be living like kings. Instead, they are trying to pick up extra shifts just to pay the power bill. Farmers work seven days a week only to be ripped off at the farm gate by multinationals.

The other day I attended a jobs seminar where a drop in unemployment was being celebrated by those on both sides of the fence. As I analysed the data presented to me I could not help noticing what jobs were on the increase and what jobs were on the steep decline. We are seeing a large drop in mining, construction and manufacturing roles, which historically netted families a \$100,000-per-year income, with a trending increase in more government based and hospital positions with an average income of \$60,000 per year gross. It might make the bean counters feel all warm and fuzzy inside watching the unemployment statistics drop, but it is no wonder we are still seeing a struggling economy. Families no longer have an expendable income, which hurts small business.

I see no problem in bringing down wages if we are going to also find ways to bring down the cost of living. The jump in the price of the goods and services we all need to survive is crippling average Queenslanders as multinationals, banks and insurance companies get rich off our suffering. Many people in my patch are paying off homes they bought during the mining boom on heavily deflated incomes. Maybe Horne was right—maybe we are just a bunch of idiots and the only lucky thing about this place is that we have got away with this for so long. I am desperate to prove Horne wrong, and so should other members.

The 'tiger in my tank' as KAP's federal leader, Bob Katter, would say, has been with me since I was young. I grew up at Hawkins Creek near Ingham on a cane farm owned by the Dametto family. This was a time where common sense reigned true and the waterways were a safe place for kids to swim and wade in knee-deep water fishing until dark along the Herbert River and a child learnt how to shoot and respect a firearm.

My beautiful mother, Lois Elizabeth Dametto, raised me. She was a hardworking single mum who did all she could to provide the very best she could for her children, even if that meant she often missed out. I was brought up on good Christian morals and dragged to church on Sunday at the Church of St Peter, Halifax. I was taught that manners were free, and that they would open more doors than golden keys. I learned from a young age that we were not well off. We did not drive a new car and sometimes we wore clothes from St Vincent de Paul. If I wanted to have anything extra in life, then I knew I was going to have to work hard for it. More than ever, I am so glad to have the upbringing I had.

I believe a lot of politicians are born with silver spoons in their mouths and do not know what it is like to wait for the next pay cheque to be able to afford groceries. I am proud that nothing in life has been handed to me. From the age of 15 I worked every afternoon after school at the local Repco spare parts shop and later Friday nights at the local bakery. I also did Saturdays at Chandlers electrical and whitegoods store. Hard work—this is how my nonno taught me to get ahead in the Lucky Country.

My dad was not always around, but when he was I tried my best to learn what I could from him. His charisma and drive gave me the inspiration to try anything. His willingness to have a go gave me a real world education in charter boats, house renovations, banana farming and life. He taught me how to shake a man's hand and look him in the eye when you speak and to keep your word because, let us be honest, your word is all you really have. There are two types of people in this world—doers and gunna doers.

Those lessons and those from my mum and Nonno have got me through many situations, including a major curve ball in my late teens. Alicia Maree Garutti, now Dametto, and I fell in love in high school. We got the shock of our young lives when we became parents at the age of 18. I am very proud to call Alicia my wife. We are relatively new to politics, but I am already aware of what a difference it makes to have a supportive partner. Alicia, thank you for everything.

Our son, Deekin, is nearly 17. Mate, there is no denying you were a surprise, but you are the best thing that ever happened to us and you have grown up to be a great young man. You make us proud every day. You are your own person and all I wish is that you learn from me the lessons I have had to teach myself. This, I believe, will halve your time in finding success in life. Being a young parent

comes with enormous struggles. I am sure anyone who has been through this will understand. For it to work you have to grow up quite fast. With hard work and support from both our families, we have made it work.

I completed my schooling at Gilroy Santa Maria College in Ingham in 2000 and recently had an opportunity to attend their year 12 induction mass. I reflected with an old schoolteacher. I said if I had one message to give to the students it would be, 'You don't need to do well at school to be successful in life, but to be successful in life you're going to have to learn the content you should have learnt while at school, but in your own time. Let me tell you, you're best off learning it while you have a teacher there to teach it to you.'

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Mr DAMETTO:** We all learned the hard way, didn't we? I was blessed to be given the opportunity in 2001 to start an apprenticeship with CSR Victoria Sugar Mill as a mechanical fitter and fabricator. On completion of my apprenticeship in 2005, I decided to move to Townsville and chase the holy dollar into the depths of the mining industry. I spent 10 years working in the mining and construction industry. Mining took me from two kilometres underground in the north-west Queensland minerals province to 50-plus degree heat and the sweeping red dirt plains of the Pilbara region in Western Australia. Both environments were as harsh as each other, but I kept my eye on the financial prize. My nonno's words stuck with me: 'This is the Lucky Country where hard work pays off.'

As the mining boom bubble burst, the crash was just around the corner, and those who did not see it coming were left on struggle street as overinflated housing prices crippled families, as I can assure you that wages dropped but monthly repayments did not. What I was seeing around me worried me, but I did not give up. That was not the answer. In 2016, my passion for my local area and creating change saw me start a new business venture. I have always loved the ocean and considered the magnificent waterways that surround Townsville to be a world-beating attraction. With the closure of prominent mine sites and refineries that fuelled the Townsville economy, I saw an opportunity for our city to redefine itself and reinvent itself as a tourism destination.

One day when I was walking along the Townsville Strand I noticed an older gentleman who seemed a little lost. I asked, 'Can I help you, sir?' He responded in the strongest American accent, 'Where are all the people, man? This place is prettier than Hawaii. This place should be buzzing.' I could not agree more. I decided to start Townsville WaterSports, which specialised in guided jet ski tours. It was lucky that I was raised on a diet of hard work because anyone who has been in the trenches of running a small business knows that it is not easy. Yes, it was hard going, but I loved it. I was doing what inspired me—being out on the water, promoting my region and meeting people from all walks of life. I was sharing an experience with people that they would remember for the rest of their lives.

I had traded the long pants and hi-vis orange shirts of my construction days for sunscreen and smiles—but more and more I was becoming distressed with what I was seeing around me in the wider community. I was seeing a state being sold off to foreigners, farmers on their knees and hardworking families struggling to pay the bills. What I was seeing around me was looking more and more like Donald Horne's version of the Lucky Country and less like my nonno's version. This is when I decided that I wanted to do more for my community, so I decided to run for Katter's Australian Party for the seat of Hinchinbrook.

I intend to lead and not take my fellow countrymen for a fool and I will no longer ride this Lucky Country wave with my eyes closed because the inevitable crash of misfortune is just around the corner, ladies and gentlemen. If we as leaders do not take charge and steer this state in the right direction, unfortunately we all prove Donald Horne right while the world mocks the Lucky Country. How do we fix it? Well, we can start by putting politics aside. We can start working together to do what is best for our communities, for this state and, inevitably, for this country. You might laugh at the idea and say, 'This guy is a bit naive, and he doesn't know how it works down here.' What I do know is that the way it has been operating has not been working, especially for North Queensland. It most definitely has not turned this place into the Lucky Country that it could be.

Actually I have been quite naive when it comes to politics. It infuriates me to learn that in the last parliament, when my Katter's Australian Party colleagues, Robbie Katter and Shane Knuth, introduced bills that would be good for regional Queensland, the major parties voted them down, more or less because they did not want to see KAP put runs on the board. They were worried about losing a few votes to KAP at the next election. Guess what? Here I am. Is it a testament to our hard work in the north or a lack of support from both sides in this place for North Queensland's fair share? If anyone in this parliament puts forward good ideas and good legislation that will bring us closer to being the lucky country, I will support it because then we all win. We have less than three years here. If we put all of our time and energy into doing positive things for our communities, for this state and for this country, we will all be better off.

To every KAP supporter and member, booth worker, pamphlet deliverer and person who erected a corflute sign: thank you. I will not let you down. I would like to give a special mention to Sarah Mennie, who helped us along the way. I give a special thanks to Yolanda DeLuca, my sister and my campaign manager. I think we might have broken the record on this one. The night I called on you to run a 3½-week campaign on a shoestring budget I knew we must have been insane to take on such a monumental task. I know that we have both found great joy in silencing the critics and got it done when they said we could not. How did we do it? With good old-fashioned hard work and things we both picked up from running small businesses.

For all those who have helped me because you could see that the way things were being done was not getting us anywhere, I will not give up. I would like to give a special thank you to my mother, my mother-in-law, Mandy Garutti, and my sister-in-law, Cassandra Lenzo, for manning the pre-polling booths at Ingham. I believe that with your help we got this over the line. As is the Katter's Australian Party way, I will always vote in the best interests of my electorate. I believe that before anyone in this place is allowed to vote on something that affects people's way of life or their livelihood they should at least take the time to walk a day in their shoes.

To Bob Katter, thank you for fighting the good fight for the Lucky Country for now 45 years. Thank you for never giving up and for giving me a chance, for tapping me on the shoulder and asking me to stand up. You have changed my life. To my colleagues Robbie Katter and Shane Knuth, thank you for your support, for getting me this far and for teaching me that it should not be about politics; instead it should be about the people we represent. Most of all, thank you to my mum and my nonno for giving me hope for the Lucky Country and for teaching me right from wrong and that you fight until the end.