




Speech By
Adrian Tantari

MEMBER FOR HERVEY BAY

Record of Proceedings, 1 December 2020

INAUGURAL SPEECH

 **Mr TANTARI** (Hervey Bay—ALP) (11.40 am): I rise for the first time in this place, humbled and honoured by the trust the people of the Hervey Bay electorate have placed in me and the Palaszczuk government to represent them here. I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands that we meet on today, the Turrbal people, and pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

It is a great honour to stand here as the fifth elected member for Hervey Bay, to serve their interests and work for their needs. I understand the enormous trust that has been given to me and I will always strive to ensure their interests are represented first in this place. I also wish to acknowledge the retiring former member, Mr Ted Sorensen, for his service to the people of the Hervey Bay electorate and I wish him and his wife, Jenny, all the very best in their retirement.

At the election, the people of the Hervey Bay electorate chose a fresh start. They chose to put their trust in our Premier and the government that she leads. In seeing through the shallow promises of those opposite, they were comfortable in the knowledge that our Premier will always put people first, that she will not be dictated to and that she will keep them safe whilst building a strong economic recovery for all Queenslanders. Whether they be from the city or the country, rural or regional, she will stand strong with them to move us all forward beyond the difficult events of this year.

Hervey Bay is an electorate that is special. It has limitless natural beauty, from its pristine waters of the Hervey Bay itself, to the unique areas of the Great Sandy Straits, to the diverse flora and fauna of K'gari—Fraser Island—the national and World Heritage listed sand island and one of the natural wonders of the world. I must note without understating it that it is going through a very challenging period right at this time. I would like to put on the record my recognition of the men and women of the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services, the Rural Fire Service, the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and the Butchulla Aboriginal Corporation who have been and are currently battling the ongoing fire situation there. Your work to contain and limit the damage to this natural beauty is a testament to your grit and determination to protect life and property.

The people who live in the Hervey Bay electorate, from the suburbs of Pialba, Torquay, Scarness, Kawungan, Point Vernon, Urangan, Urraween, Eli Waters, Wondunna and the townships and hamlets of River Heads, Eurong and Happy Valley, just to name a few, are fully aware that they live in one of the world's most unique locations and are proud of our diverse region. The Hervey Bay area has a rich history, one where fields were sown for cane and crops, timber was logged and sand was mined, cattle raised and fishing enjoyed. This collection of small villages became the holiday playground for the industrial town of Maryborough, just down the road. Since then, the Hervey Bay electorate has grown to become a thriving diverse community and city.

May I inform the House that many years ago members in this place often referred to Hervey Bay as a place for the newlyweds and the nearly deads, or God's waiting room. I can tell honourable members that this is well and truly not the case anymore and that myth should be expunged. The Hervey Bay electorate is now a growing regional area of around 53,000 people. Its people are drawn from all over Australia and the world. From the traditional owners, the Butchulla peoples thousands of years

young, with their own dialect, laws and customs as told to them by their Moonie Jarl, to those whose time may only span weeks or months, they come from the north and the south of our great country and via perilous journeys in boats and in planes. These are the people who make our region diverse. People come to the bay to enjoy an enhanced healthy lifestyle, interacting with its natural surrounds, and to lay down foundations for their future and that of their children.

Hervey Bay is an electorate on the move, a growing and ever diverse city and region, full of growing opportunity. Why, you might ask? The answer is simple. Since the cutting of community services, the selling of public assets and the sacking of hardworking nurses, teachers and public servants by those opposite stopped five years ago, the Hervey Bay electorate has a new vigour and an excitement about the services and programs being delivered by successive Palaszczuk Labor governments, even though it pained the opposition to say so. I speak of services and projects like the \$42 million Hervey Bay accident and emergency centre at the Hervey Bay Hospital built by Labor; the \$5.4 million Hervey Bay State High School performing arts centre under construction, employing dozens of local tradies and apprentices; new multipurpose halls coming to the Urangan school communities; upgraded and enhanced roads and the removal of dangerous intersections—all delivered or being delivered by this government.

There have been countless Works for Queensland projects, tens of millions of dollars in infrastructure, like the skate parks, the rail trails, the walking and recreational facilities, the water parks and the adventure playgrounds in our magnificent botanical gardens, the upgraded bush chapel and the Orchid House and a tourism first, like swimming with some of the world's most beautiful creatures, complementing the best whale-watching experience on this planet bar none. These Palaszczuk Labor government outcomes have made Hervey Bay a dynamic place to live, work and play. Since the worst of those COVID months, the Hervey Bay electorate is again good to go for business because of the carefully managed and fully considered decisions taken by our Premier and her government, but there is still more to do.

Like all communities across the length and breadth of Queensland, the Hervey Bay electorate has its issues that need to be worked on and resolved. Like all growing regions, we need more jobs and more services; we need to continue to enhance our schools and our health services; and we need to ensure the Hervey Bay people are kept safe and cared for, no matter what their financial or personal status. This is what I was told as my team and I stood on the polling booths and at the market stalls, on the doorsteps, in the streets, at the footy games and down at the local pubs by the many hundreds and thousands of residents across the Hervey Bay electorate. Their message was clear. They said we need to clearly focus on the things that move us forward over those that tear us apart, the things that together will move Hervey Bay forward to an even brighter future.

I am seriously regional in my outlook and for this I do not apologise. Anybody who has worked with me during my days as a cleaner, a grocery store packer, a factory hand, a family small business partner and a government worker knows that I will use every opportunity to promote and argue the toss as to why a region should have a particular project, service or program equal to that of a larger city. I have spent nearly all my working life outside of major cities. I have a passion for bringing our regional cities and towns up to par with our city counterparts, and I will endlessly push for that over my time in this place.

I ran in two elections telling the fine people of Hervey Bay that if elected, I would strive to turn the Hervey Bay electorate into a centre of learning and education for the Wide Bay region. I know that it is a big ask as there are a number of factors in play in trying to deliver this vision. Some are out of state's control, like the shameful doubling of university fees on some degrees imposed by a coalition government that will make it harder, not easier, for children to complete their desired education in Hervey Bay, whilst we on this side make it easier by delivering free TAFE for those 25 years and under. The contrast is stark. That does not mean that I will not be trying. The reason I am focusing on this vision is because it is my lived experience. By returning to study at 30 years of age at TAFE as an adult learner and then studying at university, I observed how when people are given the opportunity to learn and train, the experience is transformative for them and their families. Their paths and opportunities are endless, and this goes for anyone at any age from any social or financial background.

The power of knowledge and newly learned skills is liberating for any who are able to pursue it, and I will work to make Hervey Bay the centre of educational excellence. During my time in this place as the member for Hervey Bay, I will focus on this amongst many other outcomes. I give a warning to the honourable ministers and assistant ministers: your doors may need a fresh coat of paint or varnish by the time this member is finished!

I, like many here, come to this place having had a varied life. I do not think I am the youngest first-term MP to be elected to this place but, as they say, age is but a number. By way of background, I am a proud first-generation son of an Italian migrant who came to this country at 17 with little in his

pocket but a lot of hope. Can you imagine at just 17 crossing the world, in a boat for a month, to a foreign country whose language you could not speak in a driven pursuit to ensure your children did not have to suffer the ravages of a war-torn country?

My father, Pietro Tantari, better known as Peter, was a strong man, driven to succeed. He would instil in his sons a pride in the dignity of work, whatever it may be, or in education, which for him ended at age seven because of war. His ongoing learning was to master the English language through his son's learnings and to remove his own prejudices and intolerances of things that may be different from the way he was raised. What my father saw as a young man was horrific. He passed down to his sons that, no matter who you are or where you are from, we all are human and we all want the same things: a good, healthy life free from discrimination and persecution and to be able to provide for and raise our families so that, hopefully, our children get better opportunities than we ourselves had. The one lesson that stays with me today is how Dad, with Mum, built our life with bare hands and aching backs. Dad always said, 'Work hard and enjoy the rewards. Sons, you only get out what you put in.'

My mother, Lois, whom we lost only a little over two weeks ago, was the family bedrock. She would care for and provide our home, our safe haven, whilst Dad worked extraordinarily long hours. My recall of Dad at an early age was to see him come home exhausted, only to find him gone again before we woke. It was normal not to see him for lengthy periods as he tended to his work and provided as much as he could for us all. With Dad gone, Mum was the one who would often spark my interest in a social issue of the day but, because I was of such a young age, I would often wonder what she was on about. It was not until I got older and we as a family fell into some rough times that I realised why she was so animated about some old, grey-haired, white guy on a grainy black-and-white TV. How the circle turns! At least I am in colour now! It was these lived experiences that planted the seeds of understanding of how the decisions taken by people in places like this House can alter and change lives.

My political journey commenced with political actions or inactions at a national and local level. I will show my age now, but I grew up at a time when the world was experiencing a fair bit of turmoil. The issues floating at the time were raw for this country. One issue was the Vietnam War and the protests about whether our boys should go. My brother Carl was on the cusp. Fortunately, his number did not come up. Then the Whitlam-Barnard government put an end to that episode. Another of these actions was the Dismissal. My young brain could not comprehend how an elected Prime Minister could be dismissed in such a fashion. I thought it was unfair and basically undemocratic. I think this, too, planted a seed that later became an interest in how our country and states were run.

As I did not come from a family steeped in politics or from a union background, I was the first in my family to join a political party in Australia. My dad was interested in the politics of his old country but did not engage in activity here in Australia. At election time, my mum would be heard saying to her relatives, 'Labor's the only party that looked after us'—'us' meaning the working class.

When my mum and dad went through a rough personal patch, which is all too common today but which back then was something not spoken about, my mum had to seek assistance to find housing. As Mum doorknocked the then political offices, it was a Labor politician and his staff who put their hand out and made us safe. His name was Lance Barnard and his staff member was Gill James, who in her own right went on to become a long-serving Labor member for the Tasmanian House of Assembly. It was through this caring act that I knew that Labor was the party I could believe in—one that helped the down-and-out and the battler when we needed help.

My values were honed by these actions, and I knew that the values to take me through life would be fairness and equality for all—no matter your social standing, the colour of your skin or any of your preferences. I thought at the time that doing a job like that, where you actually make a real difference in people's lives, would be great. Little did I know at that time that eventually I would go on to do that role for four members of parliament. From that time on, I have always wanted to help make a difference in people's lives. I knew then, as I have over the last 30 years of membership, that the great Australian Labor Party is the party of the people, the party of my values and the party for all who need a helping hand.

I take the opportunity to thank the tireless workers who made my standing in this place a reality. They are the women and men who make up the Hervey Bay branch of the Australian Labor Party. Without discounting the work done by any of the many who helped on the stalls and the roadsides, letterboxed thousands of leaflets and generally kept the candidate on track, I would like to put on the record my sincere and deepest thanks to Ross and Loraine Olm, Bert and Carol Dawson, Rosemary Skinner, Jane Barnes and Trevor Collison. They were my ragtag bunch, my bowyang. They held me up, they gave everything and more when I needed it most over two campaigns and they supported me in some of my toughest moments. We hung tough and we made it. For that, I and the Labor movement will forever be in your debt.

There is one person I must single out: the Hervey Bay branch's unflappable secretary, Doreen Wright. With her wonderful partner, Andy, she stepped up and took over when my world started to spin rapidly. She was my manager, carer and sounding-board when I needed it most. Doreen, no words can describe your courage in this campaign. I will forever be indebted to you for your dedication to the cause and for your wise counsel.

One of the hardest challenges for a candidate to enter this place is the enormous weight that we bring to bear on our closest people, the ones we love—our family and our friends. They carry a heavy burden trying to love you when 'candidate-itis' sets in. To my sons, Ben and Sam, who will have to deal with his own lifelong challenges, I thank you for being strong whilst Dad was away for long periods over two campaigns and for continuing to step up now that I am in this place. I love you and apologise now for the lost time we will not spend together. Son, you will always be my champion and the source of my inspiration as I try to solve some of our hometown's problems.

To my beautiful daughter, Anna, born in Hervey Bay, who graduated from high school only two weeks ago: when I look into your eyes I see what you can and will be, sweetie. As I look across this chamber I know that you are inspired, as I am, by the brilliant women who sit here to represent you and your gender. Never let anyone tell you that you cannot be whatever you want to be because you are a girl. Stand up, be proud and show them all what you are made of. Watch out, world: her generation is coming. I cannot wait for their rise.

I also thank a number of other strong women who have stood up in my life and who have had to put up with my rantings and ravings and suffer from my politics over a very long time. Sue, I will always thank you for pushing me to make myself better. You hold a special place as a dear friend. Our children are the greatest gift you could have ever given. Sam, for the last number of years you have been my grounding force—the one who was there when I thought everything was turning bad. Your calmness and quiet disposition underlie a strength that has been the foundation of everything we achieved. For that I am truly grateful.

Last but by no means least, to my bros—Carl, John and Rick—to Bruce, to Paul and Trish, and to Ron and George: I would not have made it here without your support and encouragement over a long time. I would also like to thank the great Australian Labor Party, which gave me the honour and privilege of standing under the Labor flag so that I could come to this place to represent the people of the Hervey Bay electorate.

I again take this opportunity to thank the people of the Hervey Bay electorate who voted Labor, many for the first time, at the last election. Your faith in the Palaszczuk government is not taken lightly. We will strive every day to fulfil your hopes and aspirations for our great city and region, and we will deliver the services and programs that you need.

With this election over, it is now time to focus on a common goal—one where all of those from Hervey Bay work together to continue to build a fairer and more just community; one where we have a more compassionate society; one where we do not let those who fall behind stay there, where we reach back and help them to the front again; one where we put people first by keeping them safe and strong. I want to finish by quoting the inspirational words of one of the greatest talents of the modern era, Mr John Lennon, who said—

Imagine no possessions

I wonder if you can

No need for greed or hunger

A brotherhood of man

Imagine all the people sharing all the world

You may say I'm a dreamer

But I'm not the only one

I hope some day you'll join us

And the world will live as one

Thank you, Mr Speaker.