




Speech By  
**Cynthia Lui**

**MEMBER FOR COOK**

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### MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Ms LUI** (Cook—ALP) (2.05 pm): Mr Speaker, it is an honour that I, the first Torres Strait Islander elected to this place, be given the opportunity to move—

That the following address be presented to the Governor in reply to the speech delivered by His Excellency in opening this, the First Session of the 56th Parliament of Queensland—

May it please Your Excellency—

We, the Members of the Legislative Assembly of Queensland, wish to assure Your Excellency of our continued respect for the Crown and loyalty to the system of government in this State and to tender our thanks for the speech with which you opened the First Session.

The various measures to which Your Excellency referred, and all other matters that may be brought before us, will receive our careful consideration, and we shall strive to deal with them so that our endeavours may contribute to the advancement and prosperity of the people of this State.

Today I bring with me a traditional island mat. For Torres Strait Islanders this mat signifies life's journey from womb to tomb. It is used for housing material, sleeping, conceiving, birthing, initiation, education, marriage, welcoming, meetings, transport, hunting, ceremonies, shelter and to our final journey. As I begin this new journey I will embrace the significance of what this mat represents as a place to sit down and create an open dialogue around various issues.

I acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land. Koeyma eso and au esoau, which means thank you for allowing us to be here on your beautiful and sacred country and I pay my respect to elders past and present. I acknowledge His Excellency the Governor of Queensland and the Premier of Queensland, the wonderful and very honourable Anastacia Palaszczuk. Adhapudhay koeyma eso and au esoau, which means my heartfelt gratitude and thank you for this wonderful opportunity to deliver my first speech to mark the 56th Legislative Assembly. To my Aboriginal sister Minister Leeanne Enoch, it is an honour to embark on this journey with you. Just as you have inspired me with your courage, I hope to inspire others with the same courage to break barriers.

Today I stand on the shoulders of giants. I remember the 1936 maritime strike, the 23 August 1937 meeting of the Torres Strait Islander council, World War II, the 1967 referendum, 1970s 'Border not change' and the Mabo High Court decision. I honour nguzu muruygul, my ancestors, and nguzu buway, my Torres Strait heritage, as I accept this significant role in history to become the first Torres Strait Islander to enter any parliament in Australia.

I would also like to acknowledge some of the traditional owners from Cape York here today. It gives me great pleasure to deliver my speech before you all today, so thank you. I am a proud lamalaig woman of the Kulkalgal nation of the Torres Strait, and my connection extends from the central to the eastern islands of Mer and Erub islands. I am humbled and honoured to be blessed with this wonderful opportunity to be part of the 56th Legislative Assembly.

I acknowledge and I thank my parents, Getano and Lizzie, who are and continue to be my biggest role models who have inspired me with the act of giving. Having a teacher for a mother and a politician for a father shaped my values from a very young age to stand up and fight for people, to give voice to those who do not have a voice and to be a passionate advocate for regional and remote communities. I want to thank my siblings—Tom, Andrew, Harry and Florie—and their families and my children—Lizabel, Jonah, Mosiah and my precious Shaylii—for their love, strength and ongoing support.

I acknowledge and thank my campaign team for all their effort and hard work in winning the seat of Cook. No campaign is a success if not for our hardworking volunteers—Mick and Bronwyn Hodgkins, Ann Kreger, Di Forsyth, Bill Allison, Sharryn Howes, Ken Schaumberg, Duncan McInnes and Kevin Howard. I would also like to make special mention of Jan McLucas, Liam O'Reagan and Riley Lang for the hard work they put into managing my campaign and for leaving no stones unturned. I also acknowledge and thank the many volunteers across Cape York and my families in the Torres Strait who came forward to offer their support.

I come from humble beginnings. I was born and raised on Yam Island, a remote Indigenous community in the Torres Strait. As an Indigenous child growing up, I was not raised to see what I did not have nor question why I did not have certain things. My parents worked hard to make sure we had food on the table, shelter over our head and a bed to sleep in. I had access to a good education, but I pay tribute to the generations before me who did not have the same opportunity. If I got sick I knew I could access health care, a service that became a fundamental part of the society I knew growing up. My strong cultural practice and traditions allowed me to grow into a person who stood firmly in her own identity. No matter where her journey would take her she would respect and embrace all people and culture the same. I was not raised to see the challenges my parents faced living in a remote community but, rather, I saw two people who worked hard to achieve a brighter future for their community.

In my life I always had strong influences around me. There is a saying that it takes a village to raise a child. My standing here today to address the highest house in this state is evidence of the strong influence I had throughout my life. I come from a culture where I remember the good teachings of my grandmothers, mothers and sisters to stand with pride. I watched my grandfathers, fathers and brothers work hard to make a living off the sea. Growing up on an island I learnt that it takes perseverance and hard work to get things done. I was not just the child of my parents; I was the child of my community and Torres Strait. Now I consider myself the woman of Cook. I was fortunate to be raised during a time where there was no electricity, running tap water, telecommunications or adequate means of transport as I got to experience firsthand what hardship was all about—or was it? The transition to accessing adequate service made life easier and people adjusted very well to the change.

I received my education predominantly on Yam Island and was taught mostly by my mother, Lizzie Lui, and my aunty and uncle Ian and Thamey Unicomb. My kindergarten was built from corrugated iron walls and roofing with no insulation, and my primary school was built of fibro walls set on bare concrete floors. As with every remote child, I left my home and family at the age of 11 to attend high school. I experienced major detachment from my family because suddenly I had to stand on my own two feet.

I was raised in community housing that was different from all the other dwellings on the island. However, the community housing I was raised in had cupboards fall apart, holes in the floor and leaks in the ceiling. The chipboard material used to build my house would now be deemed inadequate to withstand certain weather conditions. We all come from different backgrounds and we all embrace our experiences in different ways. I have embraced my earlier experiences to give back to society—to help people, to help communities and, most importantly, to contribute to positive change in society through the fight for equity, fairness and social justice.

My journey to this point was never clearly defined. I have aspired to do many different things in my life, but the one thing that remained certain was my passion for helping people, and with that life took me through a series of experiences. One could say my journey to politics started after high school when I began my first job as a trainee health worker. I worked in a clinic staffed predominantly by Indigenous health workers, a visiting nurse and a doctor. My maternal grandmother died at 65. I was on call the night my paternal grandfather passed and I remember sitting at the end of his bed. Unfortunately, I experienced the passing of many loved ones in my community and each time it felt like I failed.

I was passionate about making a difference in health, and I worked hard to educate and raise awareness for better health outcomes in my community, but I did not quite understand nor appreciate the much larger issues. Health is not an isolated issue, and as a then health worker with a strong passion to make a difference I could not solve the larger issues of employment, housing, education and the high cost of living. I held the responsibility of my community on my shoulders, but I always felt that everything was beyond me.

I would like to acknowledge Robyn White, a clinical nurse consultant, my mentor and dear friend who saw in me what I could not see in myself and for continually pushing me to my limits and to see life beyond the stereotypical norm. I choose to tell my story today because I want members to understand that people in regional and remote communities do not often get a choice and they accept what they are given and do not question why things happen the way they do. However, we, as members of this Legislative Assembly, do in the decisions we make.

When I finally left Yam Island I was frustrated and tired. I moved to working in areas of child protection and women's issues around domestic and family violence and homelessness in both government and non-government organisations. This experience allowed me to see how, as a society, we have become so immersed in policies that the worst affected are the most vulnerable. I am now at this point where I feel truly blessed to be given this opportunity to represent the unique electorate of Cook—in a position where I could do so much more in my capacity to make a difference to people's lives.

I know that each and every one of my colleagues in this place believes that their electorate is special, but I put it to them that Cook is unique in its diversity—geographically, culturally, socially and environmentally. In a policy sense we cannot think of the electorate of Cook as a single community with one set of priorities. Issues that are at the forefront in one part of the electorate may not resonate in another part. Each part of the electorate warrants attention to its specific agenda.

Cook has the largest number of local authorities of any electorate, with 17 LGAs either fully or partly included. I want to work closely with all of these councils as a partnership to achieve the economic and social outcomes that they desire. I acknowledge that each township and community has its own priorities and goals and that will be the basis of my work to build stronger communities. I see my role as very much working in partnership with the local government leadership to achieve their aspirations.

The Mareeba Shire Council is partly included in my electorate. Mareeba is a growing and vibrant community. The economy is based on the strong agricultural sector, which is growing and dynamic. Sugar, bananas and mangoes provide a stable economic base, with developing agricultural industries, like coffee, showing the ability of this farming community to innovate.

The Douglas shire is proud to be the only place in the world where two World Heritage areas that are listed for their natural values adjoin—the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The Great Barrier Reef is the world's most extensive coral reef system and the Wet Tropics contains an extremely rich and unique biodiversity, but these values are under threat due to climate change. Their environmental values demand protection and it is our responsibility as Queenslanders and as Australians to do our part to ensure that these significant values are protected into the future. It is also important to note that the economy of Douglas shire is very much linked to the health of these two iconic places. Tourism along with sugar and other primary industries in the Douglas shire are the key economic drivers which must be supported.

The vast Cook Shire Council is based in Cooktown, which also has a significant tourism industry. Grazing, fishing and land management are significant employers across the shire, along with education and health services. The Cook shire is home to the largest network of roads in my electorate, and the investment we have seen in the last few years into the Peninsula Developmental Road has been really successful, with significant numbers of local people successfully tendering for a range of work.

Cape York Peninsula is home to the Aboriginal shire councils of Wujal Wujal, Hope Vale, Lockhart River, Mapoon, Napranum, Aurukun, Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama, along with the Weipa Town Authority. Creating employment is fundamental to growing the economy of the communities. I want to point to the growing economy based on local arts practice on Cape York and Torres Strait. I want to recognise the engagement of Arts Queensland with these existing and emerging artists. The Cairns Indigenous Arts Fair is integral to growing these opportunities, and I thank the Premier and the government for their ongoing support of CIAF. The bauxite mining on the western cape provides significant employment based mainly in Weipa. There will be growth in this area in years to come, and I want to work with the industry to increase local employment in the interests of both local residents and the mining companies.

The Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council is home to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Injinoo, Umagico and New Mapoon along with Bamaga and Seisia. The NPA is a service centre with great opportunities for development, particularly in tourism and fishing.

People of the Torres Strait are represented through the Torres shire and the Torres Strait Island Regional Council along with the Torres Strait Regional Authority. The service sectors are the major employers, including health and education, with Commonwealth and state government departments providing regional presence. Fishing provides significant employment, and tourism has enormous potential.

However, climate change is providing a real challenge. We have seen the recent events that have resulted in inundation of some of the outer island communities in the Torres Strait, and we know that the impact of the annual high tides at this time of year is becoming more problematic. I urge the Commonwealth to take their responsibilities to respond to climate change seriously. We need to work on the global stage to discuss the causes of climate change and also at a local level to address the impacts on local communities. The Torres Strait is Australia's only physical border, which brings a huge range of consideration when developing policy.

My electorate has great opportunities and also challenges. It is my strong belief that we all have a responsibility to work together to build stronger communities. I know already of the strong support for the people of my electorate from our government, whether it be Minister Miles visiting Mareeba in his first week as health minister, Minister Craig Crawford's visit to Yam Island in the Torres Strait to assess the devastating impact of rising sea levels as a result of global warming, or Minister Mick de Brenni in his strong advocacy for the continuation of Commonwealth funding for housing in remote Indigenous communities. The Palaszczuk government has been instrumental in keeping communities connected through the engagement of all the ministerial and government champions who take their obligations to work with local people seriously. I stand proud to support a government that works hard for all Queenslanders.

I remember the words of my grandfather, the late Mr Getano Lui Snr: 'Do your best. Never give up.' While I have this opportunity, I will strive to do the very best in my capacity to serve the people of Cook and contribute to this great state.