




Speech By  
**Julianne Gilbert**

**MEMBER FOR MACKAY**

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### MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Mrs GILBERT** (Mackay—ALP) (12.38 pm): I want to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which parliament meets and also acknowledge the traditional owners of the land of the Mackay electorate, the Yuwiburra people. I want to pay my respects to elders past and present.

This afternoon I rise with a great amount of pride—Mackay pride. Honourable members may wish to get an insight into my beautiful home electorate by entering #MackayPride. There they will see that Mackay is a diverse and vibrant city with an enviable lifestyle and a varied economy. Mackay has world-class natural resources, impressive natural and man-made environments, and a location and climate that are the envy of many. I am the fifth representative of Labor values to represent Mackay in the Queensland parliament. On 22 May this year it will be 100 years of Labor representation in this parliament for Mackay. It was on 22 May 1915 that the people of Mackay elected William Forgan Smith as the member for Mackay. He was followed by Fred Graham, Edmund Casey and Tim Mulherin. It is indeed an honour to follow such distinguished members for Mackay from the past century.

I am of course the first female member to represent the seat of Mackay in the Queensland parliament. I firmly believe that ability should be the determinate of success in any field of endeavour—not gender, not class, not wealth, not privilege. I am extremely proud to be part of a party that recognises that talent is not gender based. Indeed, an enduring Labor value is that equality of opportunity should be afforded to everyone, irrespective of gender, race, religion or means. There is ample evidence that the previous four members for the seat of Mackay believed this too. I thank them for the opportunities that their work gave to me and I pledge myself to increasing quality of opportunities for those I serve and future generations.

Almost all of the significant developments in and around Mackay have been contributed to by Labor governments. Governments of course are not sufficient in themselves to bring about change and development. Good government is about listening carefully and working in partnership with people, be they in business, industry or civil society. It is my intention to follow the example set by these great Labor leaders from Mackay and work in partnership to continue to achieve improvements and benefits for the people of Mackay.

I am proud to say I have lived in Mackay all of my life, apart for a short time at university in Rockhampton. I love Mackay and care deeply about its future. My family has lived in Mackay for five generations and now my grandchildren live there also. I want to secure economic, social and cultural opportunities for all who live in Mackay. I am proud to say that Mackay is a welcoming community. There are more than 25 different nationalities represented in our city. Our region boasts the largest South Sea Islander population in Australia. We have a larger proportion of Indigenous Australians than the Queensland state average. Mackay has many faith communities, including one of the longest standing Islamic communities in the state. All of this adds up to a varied, harmonious and tolerant community where the beliefs of the minority are respected by the majority of Mackayites.

The first Labor member for Mackay, William Forgan Smith, became Premier of Queensland in 1932 and remained in that high office for a period of 10 years. William Forgan Smith was a great advocate and promoter of education, health, economic development and, in particular, the sugar industry. A mainstay of the Mackay economy has always been the sugar industry or more accurately called the cane industry today, such is its diversification and uses from that industry. Sugar is in my blood. My grandparents Ned and Lina Benson were canefarmers. As a child I have happy memories of assisting preparing plant cane ready for planting. The Mackay region produces one-third of Australia's sugar. The region has a long-established sugar industry encompassing more than 150,000 hectares with extensive, integrated transport facilities—road, tram, rail and port—established markets, five milling facilities and a sugar refinery. Sugar production is valued at just over \$300 million annually in this region and provides employment for over 2,000 people, both on farm and in the manufacturing process.

The industry today is highly technological with the use of satellite analysis to determine planting, growing and harvesting times and operations. Mackay Sugar's co-generation and refinery are prime examples of value-adding achieving greater value from an agricultural crop. Last year the co-generation plant generated 175 gigawatt hours of power. Excess power not used internally by Mackay Sugar is exported to Ergon Energy—that is, 118 gigawatts of power. Some 87 per cent of the power generated is renewable. The Mackay region is a leader in producing bioethanol. This cane by-product is used for many items found in households, including cleaning products and hairspray. High-grade ethanol is used in medicines as well as fuel.

Although the thriving canefields are outside the Mackay electorate, the industry provides earning opportunities for tradespeople, apprentices, engineers, chemists and research and development scientists. Agriculture is important to Mackay, second only to coal as our major export earner. With an expanding middle class in Asia and increasing global population, there is a growing demand for food and fibre, and this brings many new opportunities.

Mackay has experienced significant growth over the last decade on the back of the mining boom, but agriculture has long been the key industry and will remain so for the foreseeable future, making up over 20 per cent of the total business of the region. Mackay is the major service centre supporting the coalmining operations of the Bowen Basin. The Bowen Basin is the home of some of the world's best quality coal reserves and is the largest coal reserve in Australia. Opportunities in alternate energy fuels and biobased industrial products will see Mackay expand its coal interests to also become a leading producer of biobased products in the Asia-Pacific region in the future.

The mining support industry is based mainly in the suburb of Paget, which is home to a range of engineering companies which export services and equipment, including to China, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea and Ghana. I am keen to encourage and support these firms to find new export markets for their considerable expertise and innovation. New opportunities exist in South America and southern Asia. Already these industries employ directly eight per cent of the Mackay labour force.

Manufacturing is mainly heavy fabrication and mining related maintenance supporting the mining industry through all stages of the mining process, from exploration to mine site rehabilitation. This valuable expertise is a highly exportable commodity. Across the Paget industrial estate there is the highest concentration of patents in Australia. This is Australia's Silicon Valley for engineering innovation. I will use every endeavour as the member for Mackay to assist the mining support industries to develop further. I have a family connection to the engineering industry. As well as sugar in my blood, I have steel in my backbone. My great-grandfather Bobby Nielsen established Mackay's first foundry in Alfred Street, Mackay. This foundry was later to relocate to the Mackay city gates. The foundry produced Queensland's railway tracks for many years. Much has been said of the mining downturn. Certainly, the coalmining industry is in a consolidation phase of seeking greater efficiencies of operation in the face of falling commodity prices and demand. The fact remains that the value of coal being exported has in fact risen, albeit earning less per tonne. This is testament to the resilience of the industry. The industry will continue to find new ways of being sustainable.

Mackay is in a strong position to continue to play a leading role in Queensland's coal industry. It has the Palaszczuk government's support and it also has my support. I have met families who have been forced to move from Mackay to other parts of the state in order to keep their employment in the industry only to be required to fly back to Mackay for work. That does not make sense. It is not fair on those families and it is not fair for Mackay. I fully support the Palaszczuk government's stance on guaranteeing miners the right to choose where they reside.

William Forgan Smith displayed a passion for developing educational opportunities. He encouraged the relocation of the University of Queensland and sponsored new faculties such as medicine, dentistry, veterinary science, agriculture and physical education. He would have been very

proud of Edmund Casey's advocacy and the Goss Labor government's original funding of the Mackay campus of Central Queensland University, Tim Mulherin's advocacy for the trade training centre and the funding support given by the Rudd-Gillard governments to develop that campus to be the first dual-sector university in Queensland by merging TAFE and the university. The multimillion dollar trade training centre and the soon-to-be-completed engineering centre now offer education and training that is tailored to the mining and resources industry as well as other local industries. Mackay is now a multicampus city, with the Ooralea and city campuses providing vocational and training opportunities across a broad range of courses. The hard work and foresight of Edmund and Tim has paid dividends for Mackay. It has provided equality of opportunity for the residents of Mackay and its region.

CQUniversity has the potential to grow into a top international university, adding another layer of economic and educational development to the Mackay economy. The university has plans to develop a sporting precinct, including an Olympic-grade running track and swimming pool to attract international students and encourage more of our local brightest to study at their local university. The sporting hub will also enrich the sporting experiences of all the residents in the Mackay region and, hopefully, encourage our local school leavers to consider further education at a tertiary level. The number of our young people choosing further education in Mackay is low compared to the state average. To expand our economy and skill base of workers, we need to start now with our school leavers.

I am a strong advocate for education as a key for people to unlock opportunities. I chose to leave school after year 10, but by the time I turned 22 I knew that, if I wanted more fulfilling employment, I needed further education. I was able to continue working and access TAFE in the evenings to complete my senior certificate. The opportunity to continue my education opened up for me an opportunity to go to university to complete a Bachelor of Education. Education and training policies need to have flexible pathways built into them. As Mackay's traditional industries evolve and diversify, the availability of education and training has never been more important. Mackay's industries will rely heavily on quality education and training courses to upskill and retrain workers.

Tourism is an industry that has been underdeveloped in Mackay. Mackay boasts some of the state's most beautiful natural environments. Mackay is the gateway to the Great Barrier Reef and the doorway to the Eungella National Park. It has a comprehensive range of accommodation options, ranging from top five star to our comfortable caravan parks and camping facilities. The beauty of Mackay is waiting for all my fellow honourable members to discover.

The community of the Mackay electorate are doers. They realise that they cannot sit back and wait for economic opportunities to come to them. Under the thoughtful stewardship of the mayor, Councillor Deirdre Comerford, the Diversify Mackay Leadership Alliance was formed with five priorities: tourism and social wellbeing; agriculture; mining and defence services; infrastructure and construction; and education, training, research and innovation. The Diversify Mackay Leadership Alliance is a collaboration and a formal alliance of business, industry, community organisations and government working together. This leadership team is exploring areas of innovative business opportunities. A working group has been formed for each priority. Each business or social group now has the knowledge of developments in each other's sectors, giving greater opportunities for advancement.

This sharing of ideas and expansion is evident in the project of Pioneer State High School and CQUniversity, with linkages to the resource sector. Under the leadership of Joel Buchholz, the Principal of Pioneer State High School, and Pierre Voljeon, who is the Associate Vice-Chancellor of CQUniversity, Mackay, a partnership for learning excellence has been formed. This project focuses on mechatronics—taking students from simple Lego construction to sophisticated engineering construction. This partnership is only one of the positive partnerships forged and strengthened by the Diversify Mackay Leadership Alliance. The retention of our young people who are studying and, therefore, keeping their skills in our district is improved and the resource industry has young, well trained, enthusiastic potential employees. Although the leaders of each group come from a diverse range of backgrounds, they have one thing in common and that is to sustainably develop the Mackay economy. I pledge to work with the Diversify Mackay Leadership Alliance and to ensure that all possible government support is realised to develop Mackay.

Owing to the ill health of the former member for Mackay, Tim Mulherin, I had to quickly put together a campaign. Indeed, I had only 21 days as an endorsed candidate before the January election. It is times like these that you really see what a supportive community Mackay is. I wish to thank my community for their support throughout the campaign. Numerous community members came forward to volunteer to work on booths, make thousands of phone calls, staff my campaign office, do catering, man street stalls and put up election signs. Mackay ALP branch members came

back from holidays, rolled up their sleeves and put their shoulders to the wheel during some extremely humid, hot, uncomfortable days.

A campaign needs a strong campaign manager and I was lucky to have my husband, Frank. I thank Frank for his unwavering support. It would have been impossible to put together a grassroots campaign in such a short time without his help and experience. I am doubly lucky to come from a large, supportive family who all contributed many hours and hard work to get me to where I am today: my parents, Beverley and Jim Waters, and my sisters and brothers and their partners, Michelle and Jeff Graham, Susan McKay, James and Ophelia Waters, Anthony and Leesa Waters, Caroline and Jason O'Neil, my daughter and son-in-law, Catherine and Ian and my grandchildren, Kai, Keione and Sienna Hulme-Moir and my stepsons David and Edward, plus my many nieces and nephews—and I am not going to name them.

My campaign was run on people power, with workers giving up their time after work or, indeed, some taking holidays to work on my campaign. Shane McKenna and Tom Kenny kept everyone on track and focused. I thank them both. I would also like to thank the Mackay QCU and all the delegates who organised volunteers to work on booths and make phone calls and my former Queensland Teachers' Union colleagues and teachers, whose moral support and volunteer hours were invaluable and a great encouragement.

It is a great privilege to represent all the people of Mackay. I give my commitment to the entire region. I will work with tireless effort and steadfast determination for the betterment of Mackay. I will continue to build on Labor's proud legacy to improve opportunities for the people of Mackay. I will strive with rigour and zeal to create a resilient, robust, dynamic and diverse future for Mackay—a future grown on a solid, labour-built foundation of persistence, passion and pride, Mackay pride.