



Speech By **Patrick Weir**

MEMBER FOR CONDAMINE

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Mr WEIR** (Condamine—LNP) (11.34 am): It gives me great pleasure to rise as a member of the 56th Parliament representing the seat of Condamine to deliver my address-in-reply speech. To begin, I congratulate the Hon. Curtis Pitt on the honour of being elected Speaker of this House. Having myself been given the privilege of being one of the temporary Speakers, I look forward to working with the Speaker and other temporary Speakers throughout this term.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as you and others in this establishment know, politics can be a brutal game. Our time in this place is uncertain. At every election seats are won and lost and new faces replace the old. I have been lucky enough to have been re-elected for my second term. For the first time I have witnessed colleagues and friends with whom I served lose their seats. Some of those losses were harder than others, and I make special mention of the former member for Hinchinbrook, Andrew Cripps, and the former member for Redlands, Matt McEachan. I wish them and all our other colleagues who were not returned all the best for the future whatever path they choose to follow.

I would also like to acknowledge our former member who retired at the end of the 55th Parliament: Lawrence Springborg, Jeff Seeney and Ian Rickuss. All of these members made significant contributions to the parliament and their respective electorates. When I first joined the then National Party in March 2003 I received a letter welcoming me to the party from the then new leader of the opposition, Lawrence Springborg. I met Lawrence soon afterwards and a friendship began which endures to this day through all the ups and downs of the political world. There are few people I have met during the course of my life that I would hold in higher regard than Lawrence Springborg. No-one could deny his dignity or integrity.

Whilst Lawrence never achieved his dream of becoming the premier of this state, he did in my opinion become the greatest health minister this state has seen during his time as a minister in the LNP government. Our health system was in crisis after years of neglect by Labor and in one term Lawrence managed to overhaul Queensland's disastrous health system, something a series of former ministers were incapable of doing. He did this not by simply throwing buckets of money at the problem but by addressing the issue of delivery outcomes, getting the best value for every dollar invested and introducing an outcomes based service delivery—a simple approach that worked very successfully. I will always be honoured to have served in the same parliament as my friend and mentor Lawrence Springborg. I wish him well for whatever the future may hold for him, Linda and the family.

I would also like to acknowledge the contribution made to this state by the former member for Callide, Jeff Seeney. Whilst Jeff could be a little less subtle at times, his contributions over his 20 years as a member of this parliament, especially during his time as deputy premier, cannot be disputed. The Royalties for the Regions program was one of his many achievements and an achievement of which he was immensely proud. This program led to some long-awaited infrastructure improvements for regional Queensland. I send my best wishes to Jeff, Therese and their family for a prosperous future.

I acknowledge the contribution of the former member for Lockyer, Ian Rickuss, or ‘Ricko’, as he was warmly known to most of us. I do not need to remind members of Ricko’s unusual fashion sense and his somewhat unruly and unconventional behaviour at times in this establishment. These are just some of the reasons we will all remember fondly the former member for Lockyer. It was Ian’s response to a particular event that occurred on 10 January 2011 that will always be front and centre of my memories of Ian. On that day, after torrential rain in Toowoomba, a wave of water swept down the range and decimated towns in the Lockyer Valley, particularly Withcott and Grantham. The damage inflicted was something usually only seen in a war zone: houses and buildings were swept away and destroyed and 12 lives were lost, and some of those bodies have never been recovered.

There would be few members of this parliament—or in this country—who have ever had to face the scale of destruction and loss of life that Ian faced after the events of that terrible day. I know the effect that event had on Ian and his wife, Ann, as they helped the community deal with their grief and rebuild devastated infrastructure. Ian and Ann worked tirelessly to assist in every way possible to assure all of their Lockyer communities were given the support they needed to go forward. They spent countless hours helping with the clean-up, listening to the locals’ stories and fighting for whatever was necessary to get the community mobile again. I wish Ian and Ann all the best in the future.

I would like to congratulate the member for Nanango, Deb Frecklington, on her election to the role of Leader of the Opposition. It is often said that there is no tougher role in politics than being the Leader of the Opposition, but the member for Nanango has embraced the challenge with enthusiasm and energy. It will be my role and the role of all members on this side of the chamber to ensure that she becomes the next premier of this state. I also congratulate the member for Everton, Tim Mander, on his election as deputy leader. I know that he will be a great support to the leader during this term. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the new members of the LNP team on their election success. I wish them all the best during this term.

The recent electoral boundary redistribution has seen some significant changes to the seat of Condamine. Whilst the southern border has remained the same with the larger townships of Clifton, Cambooya and Pittsworth remaining in the electorate, elsewhere there were major changes. On the eastern side of Toowoomba the suburb of Darling Heights is now part of Toowoomba South in the hands of David Janetzki, whilst the growing town of Meringandan is now part of Condamine. The towns of Crows Nest and Quinalow in the north approximately halfway between Bowenville and Dalby are among the new boundary changes.

The largest town of the former electorate of Condamine, Dalby, now resides in the seat of Warrego. That was one of the biggest surprises of the redistribution, especially given the fact that my electoral office is located there and the staff reside in and around Dalby. My office and I are currently working with Parliamentary Services to relocate the office to the town of Oakey in the site of the now closed ANZ Bank building. At the time of writing this speech I was hopeful of moving in there before the end of this year. I am not so confident: I think it may be early next year before we finally get there.

Mr Pegg interjected.

Mr WEIR: I have for a long time. These changes only add to the diversity that exists in the seat of Condamine. The seat is largely reliant on agriculture, with the cropping areas of Clifton, Felton, Brookstead and the Central Downs growing a diversity of broadacre crops, both irrigated and dryland: cotton, sorghum, corn, wheat and barley as well as pulses like chickpeas and mung beans. Horticultural cropping through the Felton Valley and other areas produces lettuce, carrots, onions and figs, to name a few. Much of this is exported or sent to restaurants in Queensland, Sydney and Melbourne. Pork and poultry production remains very important in the Clifton and Pittsworth areas, with new free-range poultry expansions dotted throughout this area. With the addition of the area north of the Warrego Highway, Condamine now has the highest concentration of beef feedlots in the country. The country north of the highway is predominantly grazing and cereal grains, but it also includes a number of dairy farms. One of those dairies is owned by the Rosenberg family, who milk about 900 cows per day.

I cannot help but be impressed with the sense of community in these towns. Communities like Quinalow, Kulpi, Goombungee, Haden and Crows Nest are all extremely proud of their heritage and are always looking for ways to enhance their townships. It was in the small town of Haden that I cast my vote in the 2017 election at the Haden school. My mother was a student at the Haden school and her father—my grandfather, Jack Coonan—was a first-day student when the school opened its doors back in 1912. His father—my great-grandfather, Tim Coonan—was the treasurer of the committee formed to build a new school for the town. Tim Coonan was a well-known identity in the Haden-Crows Nest area for a few reasons, not the least being his physique. He was a very big man: six foot six and 22 stone, I am told. Any of the old photographs from the time show Tim standing about a head taller than anyone else in the picture.

He did not have an easy start to life, as his father, who was an Irish immigrant, was killed in a fall from a horse aged 42. Tim was only a very young boy. One can only imagine the hardship that his mother had to endure to raise a young family alone in that era. Despite this, Tim went on to many different tasks and enterprises in his life, including owning and running a small dairy farm and building a couple of hotels. He built and owned the Royal Hotel in Haden, and my grandfather told me many stories about growing up around the pub and the many characters he met during that time. It sadly burned down sometime after Tim sold it to concentrate on the family farming enterprise. My grandfather, Jack Coonan, was great friends with the French family from Crows Nest. The family owned the local barbershop with Albert, the father, and John, the son, both working there. Albert was your typical barber, full of local gossip and chatty, while John was much quieter. John enlisted for service in the Second World War and was killed at Milne Bay in New Guinea on 4 September 1942. He was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for outstanding bravery—one of only 20 VCs awarded to Australians during the war. John French is one of Crows Nest's most famous sons.

Although the seat of Condamine has a long history of agriculture, it also has large manufacturing, engineering and construction sectors. These industries employ a large number of people and have been growing at a rapid rate over the past five to six years. There are several major projects within the Condamine electorate, including the second range crossing, the Charlton industrial area and the Wellcamp airport. These have all contributed to the growth of the area and will ensure a strong economic future for the region.

The areas south-west of Toowoomba are experiencing rapid growth, with a large number of housing developments being approved and built upon. With these houses come families, who then require services and infrastructure to support them. Westbrook, Hodgson Vale and Wyreema are just three of the communities to experience a substantial rise in population over the past four to five years. Land is being developed for more residential blocks and commercial purposes. This is the time to start looking at the future needs of these areas. Medical, educational, recreational and emergency services requirements all need to be addressed now to ensure the community has access to essential public amenities.

The township of Oakey is experiencing two ongoing issues: the contamination of underground water from firefighting foam used at the Army aviation base and stage 3 of the New Hope Acland coalmine. Unfortunately, these issues have meant a downturn in the property market, with residences in the middle of the contamination zone being difficult to sell and small businesses suffering. The mine employs 300 people, 160 contractors and approximately 2,300 indirect jobs. All of these people are concerned for their future if stage 3 is not approved. In true Oakey form they are fighting to keep their town alive. Residents have the most amazing community spirit, and their loyalty to the town is remarkable.

The same community spirit is demonstrated with the three major tourist attractions that lie within the Condamine boundaries and are a tribute to our pioneering past: the Royal Bull's Head Inn, DownsSteam—which is an historical railway museum—and the Jondaryan Woolshed. None of these facilities would be able to operate without the assistance and dedication of a large band of volunteers. I am immensely proud of the work that is constantly being done to improve, restore and beautify these attractions. They are a tribute to those who volunteer.

Since becoming the member for Condamine I have met a lot of people, and this has been one of the most enjoyable parts of being a member of the Queensland parliament. Many meetings have been to discuss personal issues and views, many have been to support community organisations and events, and many have been to meet with small business owners who have generously given of their time to proudly show me what they have achieved. There have been so many great moments and memories. It is a difficult job sometimes; however, the incredible people you meet along the way make it all worthwhile.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge the support my family have given me since I became a member of parliament. They are always there to help me when asked—especially my mother, Mary, who resides in the town of Pittsworth, and my children, Amy and Sam. I would like to thank Peter Wilson, Bradley Siddans, Jo Saal and Pam Grundy, who have served on the executive of my SEC. Your support and encouragement are appreciated. I thank my staff—Lisa, Kylie, Sarah and Wendy—for their dedication, support and ongoing loyalty. Without them I would be completely lost. I would like to particularly acknowledge the work of Kylie, who is always there to guide, push, correct and encourage me. I remain dedicated to the electorate of Condamine and all of the remarkable people I have met so far on this journey.