

BUSINESS LIAISON ASSOCIATION

MARIO CALANNA NORTH

QUEENSLAND SPEAKING

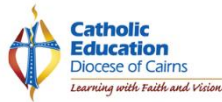
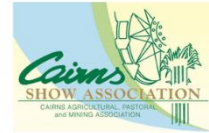
COMPETITION

SPONSORED BY

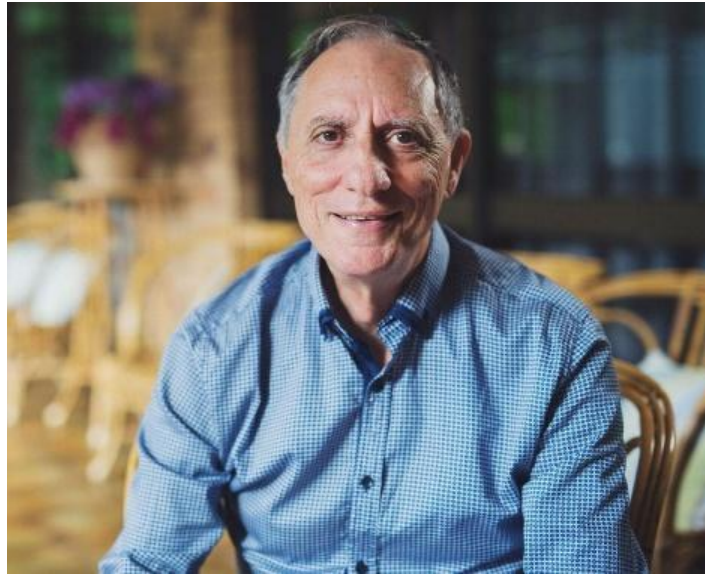


calanna
+ WHOLE HEALTH +

2026 AWARD SPONSORS



MARIO CALANNA



Mario Calanna was a highly respected pharmacist and the founder of the Calanna Pharmacy Group, a successful network of pharmacies across North and South-East Queensland. Born and raised in Woree, Cairns, Mario was the son of Italian immigrants. His father established a sugar cane farm in the region, where Mario developed his deep connection to the community from a young age.

Throughout his life, Mario was actively involved in numerous community service groups and clubs, with a particular passion for public speaking and debating. He believed strongly that confidence and self-esteem are foundational to both personal success and strong communities, and that public speaking is one of the most practical and powerful ways to develop these qualities in young people.

In 1978, Mario founded the Calanna Junior Speaking Competition. Since its inception, thousands of students have participated, building their confidence, communication skills, and leadership potential. Mario himself was an accomplished and decorated public speaker. His achievements included multiple regional speaking and debating titles, culminating in winning the Jaycees National Oratory Event – the Geoff M King Contest – in 1989.

His professional and community contributions were widely recognised, including:

- Cairns Regional Council Volunteer of the Year (2004)
- Queensland Australian Institute of Management Owner-Manager of the Year (2006)
- Inaugural Legacy Winner, Cairns Chamber of Commerce Business Excellence Awards (2017)
- Life Member, Pharmacy Guild of Australia (2022)

Mario's guiding belief was that every person is born with a purpose – that each of us is called to achieve greatness and leave a legacy of significance.

Today, we honour Mario's vision and enduring impact through the Mario Calanna Public Speaking Competition, continuing his commitment to empowering young people with confidence, voice, and purpose.

MARIO CALANNA NORTH QUEENSLAND SPEAKING COMPETITION

About the Business Liaison Association (BLA)

The Business Liaison Association (BLA) is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to building meaningful connections between education and industry across Far North Queensland – from Cardwell to the Torres Strait and west to the Tablelands and Gulf.

Each year, we empower more than 12,000 students from over 37 schools to explore diverse career pathways, engage with industry mentors, and make informed choices about their futures. By bridging the gap between the classroom and the workplace, we help young people step confidently into their next chapter – and in the process, strengthen the local workforce.

BLA embraces multicultural diversity and First Nations perspectives, fostering respect, understanding, and inclusion for all cultures and identities.

Our Mission

To inspire, inform, and empower the next generation while forging lasting partnerships between schools, business, tertiary institutions, and the community. Together, we're cultivating a skilled, sustainable regional workforce ready for the opportunities of tomorrow.

Our Mario Calanna North Queensland Speaking Competition Sponsors

Hosted by the Business Liaison Association (BLA) in partnership with local schools and community stakeholders in Cairns, North Queensland.

The Business Liaison Association extends its sincere appreciation to the MCC Bloodline Trust for their valued sponsorship of the Mario Calanna North Queensland Speaking Competition Award.

Through their ongoing support, we continue to strengthen pathways between education, training, and employment, empowering the next generation of students and future professionals across Far North Queensland.

Overview

The Business Liaison Association, in partnership with St Stephen's Catholic College, is committed to strengthening students' capacity in critical 21st century skills – communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and confidence – that are essential for future success.

This initiative provides students with meaningful opportunities to engage directly with industry representatives across a diverse range of sectors, fostering awareness of career pathways and real-world expectations. Through authentic engagement with professionals, students gain valuable insight into education, training, and employment opportunities across the Far North Queensland region.

Importantly, the program provides students from regional schools with the opportunity to articulate their ideas and perspectives, refine their public speaking capabilities, and connect with inspirational leaders and industry professionals.

The award is open to all students from Year 7 to Year 12 across the Far North Queensland region, supporting early career exploration and the development of future-ready skills and confidence.

Conditions of Entry

Two school delegates from each category are invited to attend the event and deliver a prepared speech on one of the approved topics.

Public speaking adjudicators and local community representatives will be in attendance, and all participating schools will receive a copy of the official marking guide used by the judging panel.

Schools are required to ensure strict adherence to the designated age categories and allocated time limits.

Please note that individual feedback from adjudicators will not be provided following the competition. All judges are volunteers, and the competition is conducted in accordance with the established standards and practices of Rostrum Voice of Youth and Lions Youth of the Year.

All judging decisions are final.

Transport and Catering

Schools are responsible for the organisation of transport to St Stephen's Catholic College. Students are encouraged to bring a water bottle and their own lunch. Tea, coffee and light refreshments will be provided for accompanying staff and adjudicators.

Supervision and Attendance

Participating students must be accompanied by a staff member from their school. Parents or other supporters are not invited to be on site during the competition.

Categories and Topics

Senior School (Years 11 and 12 students) – 6 minutes

- *The stories that can change our future*
- *The time is always right to do what is right*
- *The silence that speaks volumes*
- *Why hope is a strategy, not a dream*
- *Still, like dust, I'll rise*

Middle School (Years 9 and 10 students) – 5 minutes

- *The fault is not in our stars, but in ourselves*
- *The bridge we need to build*
- *Success needs a new definition*
- *The stories that lift us up*
- *Leaders hidden among us*

Junior School (Years 7 and 8 students) – 4 minutes

- *The moment that changed everything*
- *The road ahead*
- *The good that comes from giving*
- *The lesson I learned the hard way*
- *People who change the world one choice at a time*

Prize & Bursaries

First Place	\$200.00
Runner Up	\$150.00
Encouragement Award	\$100.00

Competition Date and Location

- Date: **Thursday 16th July 2026 (Week 1, Term 3)**
- Time: 10 am – 1 pm
- Venue: St Stephen's Catholic College
Holy Spirit Centre
McIver Road, Mareeba

Process

1. Application Process

- All applications are due by **Friday, 19th June 2026 (Week 9, Term 2)**
- All applications must be submitted via email to:

Laura Gilbert

St Stephen's Catholic College

lgilbert1@cns.catholic.edu

- Late applications will not be accepted.

2. Application Requirements

Applications must include:

- A completed Application Form, signed by the Head of Department and Principal (or delegate).
- An application fee of \$88.00 (incl. GST) per school (*one fee per school; non-refundable*).

3. Consent and Ethical Standards

- By entering, students and schools provide consent for photographs and video footage to be taken during interviews and the awards event, for their use in promotional materials purposes by BLA and its partners.
- Entries must be the original work of the student. The use of generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini) is not permitted in drafting or writing the submission materials. All submissions must be the student's own original work. Submissions found to breach this condition will be disqualified.
- Students and schools are encouraged to positively promote their achievements on social media and acknowledge support from the Business Liaison Association.
- BLA reserves the right to withdraw awards, bursaries, or recognitions in instances where a recipient publicly defames, misrepresents, or undermines the values or reputation of the BLA, community stakeholders, or their affiliated partners.

Payment Information

An invoice of \$88.00 will be issued to each school on the official closing date of the event.

Awards Night Presentation

Winning students will be formally recognised at the invitation-only Aspire Awards Presentation Evening. Details are as follows:

- Date: Thursday, 17th September 2026
- Time: 4:45 pm – 7:30 pm
- Venue: Cairns Performing Arts Centre (CPAC)

Award Recipient Requirements

- All award recipients are required to attend the Awards Ceremony in full formal school uniform, in accordance with their school's uniform policy.
- A formal invitation will be issued to each recipient, parent, and their respective school.

Application Form

Please forward the application to both:

Laura Gilbert

St Stephen's Catholic College
lgilbert1@cns.catholic.edu.au

Abigail Peter

Business Liaison Association
events@bla.org.au

Please complete the details below correctly.

Student Candidate Information

Legal Name: _____ Preferred Name: _____

Mobile: _____ DOB: _____

Email: _____ Year Level: _____

Address: _____

Please note: If a student is unable to attend the Awards Night, a parent or guardian will be invited to attend and accept the award on the student's behalf.

Parent Name: _____ Parent Mobile: _____

Parent Email: _____

School Information

School Name: _____ Office Ph: _____

Teacher's Name: _____ Teacher's Mob: _____

Teachers Email: _____

Name of Subject: _____ Level of Achievement: _____

Teacher's signature: _____ Date Signed: _____

Principal to Complete

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Terms and Conditions

I confirm that I have read and understood the guidelines, eligibility criteria, and all information accompanying this application. I declare that the submitted work is my original work and has been completed within the past twelve (12) months. If I am selected as a winner of this Competition, I grant permission to the Business Liaison Association (BLA) to reproduce, publish, and promote my work across media platforms, including, but not limited to, television, associated websites, and social media platforms (including Facebook and similar channels). I acknowledge that my work may attract media interest on behalf of the Business Liaison Association, and I agree to make myself reasonably available for related promotional and media activities where practicable.

Student Signature

Date