



Speech by

Mr B. LITTLEPROUD

MEMBER FOR WESTERN DOWNS

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WARREGO HIGHWAY

Mr LITTLEPROUD (Western Downs— NPA) (7.21 p.m.): Tonight I want to put on the public record my appeal to the Minister for Transport, the Honourable Steve Bredhauer, to maintain a priority in overcoming the problem of one of the flood-prone sections of the Warrego Highway. The Warrego Highway is a national highway, giving access from Brisbane through Toowoomba to the Maranoa and the Warrego. The section of the highway that I am talking about is the Yarrala road, a small section of road just west of Dalby which is currently maintained by the Wambo Shire Council. It runs adjacent to the railway line from Dalby about 18 kilometres through to Macalister.

The need to re-route the Warrego Highway is quite obvious when one considers its importance as a national highway. People in the Warrego, Maranoa, Charleville and Roma areas all need to access Brisbane via that road. People from places such as Barcaldine, Longreach, Blackall and Mount Isa in north-west Queensland also depend on it for the transport of goods and services both ways. To a certain degree, the people of central Queensland also depend upon it. People in places such as Biloela, Moura and Rolleston are dependent upon access to that road. In fact, it is also an interstate highway in that the Northern Territory depends upon it.

At this point in our history it is of major importance that, if possible, the major trunk roads in Queensland are flood free. I can understand why the current situation arises. During World War II, the Americans went to that part of Queensland and built the Condamine Highway. They had to cross the Condamine River at a place that they called Rangers Bridge. It then became obvious, when they wanted to start building the Warrego Highway along the railway line, that they should branch off the Condamine Highway and head towards the railway line which crosses Rangers Gully. When there is heavy run-off in the local area, it is not uncommon for Rangers Gully to flood. When there is a major flood in the Condamine, two or three kilometres of road is inundated for quite some time.

As to some of the products that are transported on that road, wool comes from the west for warehousing and sale, and grain from the western downs and the Maranoa has to go to the flour mills, the feed processing mills and the feedlots that have been established on the eastern end of the downs. That grain goes into silos for export from the coast. Lots of stock and perishable goods are going into those feedlots. Dalby has the biggest fat cattle saleyards in Australia, which operate every week. Most processors have their meatworks in the south-east corner of Queensland. On a more local level, cotton is grown all over that area. In Dalby there are two gins that process the cotton.

I turn now to the produce that is transported along the Warrego Highway and which can be inconvenienced by flooding. Machinery is being transported to all the fast-developing mining areas of central and north-west Queensland. Machinery is also going to the farming and agricultural belt. All sorts of chemicals are transported to that area either for long-term use or for use in emergencies, such as a locust plague or heliothis outbreaks. All the inland areas depend upon perishables, such as fresh milk, meat and bread, which are transported from Toowoomba and Brisbane. As well, the people of the west and north-west Queensland depend upon the highway for the delivery of all sorts of consumer goods.

There have been too many occasions on which that road has been cut by flooding. The Federal Government was good enough to put something like \$120,000 into planning for the new deviation

along the Yarrala road. I am appealing to the new Minister for Transport to maintain the priority that was going to be given to that deviation by the former Government, recognising that it is not just a benefit for my own shire, it is a benefit for the greater part of western and north-western Queensland. However, I am concerned about the people of Western Downs, because when the road at Rangers Gully is cut, traffic is then diverted along some of the local shire roads. In the past few years, enormous damage has been done to those roads.

Most of the traffic over those roads consists of road trains, semitrailers or B-doubles, and the foundation of those roads will not stand up to that sort of traffic. When trucks drive through country that has been inundated by floods and is soft, after only a week or two the roads break up. Enormous sums of money have had to be paid to local shires, but it is never enough to overcome the damage that has been done. So my appeal to the Government is to look after the local councils. Because of the strategic importance of that road to all those products, and bearing in mind that the present Government says that it wants to look after jobs, jobs, jobs and govern for all Queensland, it is important that this project go ahead.
