



Speech by

HOWARD HOBBS

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

Hansard 6 August 1998

MITCHELL COURTHOUSE

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (7.21 p.m.): It is with regret that I rise to advise the House that the Labor Government is back to cutting services in the bush. I thought that the Government would have learnt from its experiences. The Goss Labor Government closed 26 courthouses. The coalition reopened the courthouse in Mitchell, a town in my electorate. That courthouse is now working well.

I have just been informed that Legal Aid Queensland has advised the Roma Community Legal Service to cease providing a duty solicitor for the Magistrates Court sittings in Mitchell, which is a small rural town approximately 600 kilometres west of Brisbane. To lose the only legal service in the entire shire is absolutely unacceptable. There is no private solicitor or other legal service available to all residents in the town. The loss of that service will have the effect of denying most people in the shire access to legal representation for court appearances. It will be only those people who can afford the cost of using legal practitioners in Roma, which is 89 kilometres to the east of Mitchell, or Charleville, which is 180 kilometres to the west of Mitchell, who will be able to have representation in matters being dealt with at the Mitchell court.

Access to Government-provided services is already extremely limited in small and isolated rural areas such as Mitchell. This move by the Government serves only to maintain the image that politicians in power have no consideration or understanding of rural communities. This move impacts on young people particularly, because 40% to 50% of court cases are heard locally. As a result of removing the duty solicitor, many people will be forced to travel to Roma to have their cases heard. That will reduce the number of cases that are heard at Mitchell. Ultimately, the courthouse may be closed down yet again. That action would not be acceptable in any manner or form. I table a letter from 11 community groups in Mitchell which have expressed serious concern in relation to this issue.

Time expired.
