



Speech by

HOWARD HOBBS

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

Hansard 12 November 1998

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES, REGIONAL BOUNDARIES

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (7.26 p.m.): I rise to speak about the cutback in Government services occurring in western Queensland. The Department of Natural Resources has abolished the western region. When I restructured the Department of Natural Resources we put together six regions, with head offices based in Townsville, Rockhampton, Nambour, the Brisbane metropolitan area, Toowoomba and Longreach. Now that the regional office in Longreach is closed, there will be regional offices down the coast. Executive officers of the Department of Natural Resources will be like seagulls, perched along the coast. They will not be able to get out to the west to do the work they are supposed to do.

The western region boundaries were set up as a result of extensive consultation between departmental officers, primary producers and industry groups, and the western region was supported strongly by all of those people. There has been no consultation about the removal of the region and there has been no explanation about how service delivery will be enhanced.

The western region encompassed significant communities of interest in relation to soil types, river catchments and land use activities such as grazing and land tenure types. The western region enabled staff to have a career path in the west and gave the west a voice in the Department of Natural Resources. Now the only thing we will see of the executive officers of the department is their dust as they leave. It always happens. They go out there, stay for a while and then go. They have their families on the coast and they just keep going back.

The western region was able to compete more effectively for resources when competition was between six regions rather than 20 districts. The western region was the pilot region for the Department of Natural Resources' staff incentives program, which encouraged and retained experienced staff to the western areas. This incentives program is now no doubt doomed. The changes to the region contradict the Labor Party's own policy framework, which states—

"Labor believes there needs to be a curb on ideologically driven programs of restructuring, and downsizing."

We saw what happened under the Goss Labor Government when services were cut. It really did the wrong thing. Now this Government is giving the people of the west a poke in the eye. It is also giving the clients a poke in the eye.

Time expired.
