



Speech by

**Mr M. HORAN**

**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH**

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Hansard 6 August 1998

**ADDRESS IN REPLY**

**Mr HORAN** (Toowoomba South—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (4.07 p.m.): Mr Speaker, it is quite an honour to take part in this Address in Reply debate and to congratulate you on your achievement of the Speakership. Indeed, Mr Speaker, it is a very great honour for you after nine years in Parliament. I wish you every success.

This debate also gives me a chance to pledge my loyalty to the people of Toowoomba South and to thank them sincerely for my re-election. I also take this opportunity to thank my campaign director, Mr Rob Filmer, and my electorate council chairman, Mr Lachlan Evans. I have heard other members in this Address in Reply debate speak about their families. I know that we all rely pretty heavily on our families. I well remember that, during the 1991 by-election, my wife would work all day and then at the end of the day go around and do a bit of doorknocking. It is probably the same for most other members in this House. So being elected is a big family effort. I would like to thank my wife not only for the effort that she put in during the campaign but also for her forbearance when I was a Minister and getting home to Toowoomba on about only one night a week. At times, it is a pretty tough existence. I also want to thank my daughter, Emma, who gave up a week's work and came up to Toowoomba during the campaign.

Other members have spoken about the honour of representing their electorates. It does not matter what a member may or may not achieve in this place by way of being a shadow Minister or a Minister or being involved in various committees; one of the greatest challenges and joys of being a member of Parliament is being able to help the people in our own electorate, being able to sit in your office and talk across the desk to someone. It is very, very satisfying to be able to help someone who comes into our office.

I thank the electorate secretary who worked for me during the time I was Minister for Health—Peta Arthur. She was a marvellous electorate secretary and my ministerial liaison officer. I thank her, along with Mrs Kavinia Franklin, my former electorate secretary, for the work they undertook.

A lot has been said about this particular Parliament and about the public perception of parliamentarians. There is one thing that I think most of us realise when we come into Parliament. It certainly hit me in 1991 when I came here, as the result of a by-election, with no experience whatsoever of the political process or of Parliament. It really struck me that this was the pressure cooker of society. The reason we do have a wonderful democracy and the reason we have changes of Governments, no matter how volatile the issues—we do not have people in the streets hitting each other with sticks or duelling and shooting and all the rest of it—is that we have this institution called Parliament. There are some very divergent views, and the public do like to think that we can put those views very strongly, because on some of those issues the public feels very strongly. I hope that this Parliament does not lose the attribute that people are able to speak strongly and stridently on issues and speak in a very forthright manner for the people they represent.

As the shadow Minister for state development and rural communities, I will talk about certain relevant issues. I mention the sterling job done by the former Minister responsible for State development, the member for Burnett, Mr Doug Slack. When one looks at the fact that there is about \$16 billion worth of infrastructure in Queensland under way, about to get under way or which should be under way, one realises the amount of effort that went into bringing many projects to fruition. It is quite

saddening to think that we have a Labor Government that has already turned its back on a large number of those projects—the major water infrastructure plans, some of the power station and coalmining projects and the Briztram project. Project after project has been frozen, cancelled or put on the backburner.

The Premier, Mr Beattie, has really lost sight of the ball in terms of his 5% unemployment target. I think many people will find that that was a cruel hoax in many ways. No sooner was that target announced than the time set for achieving it was extended to one year and then to three years. Now the target is five years. I said in a previous speech that, for those people who may get a job in five years, the Olympic Games will have been held three years before.

The Queensland coalition Government was very much an achieving Government. I think the key indicator of that was that in just two short years we cleaned up the mess we inherited. Basically, we turned the economy around—from a growth rate of about 2.2% to a growth rate of 4.5%. Along with that came secure employment for so many Queenslanders. In those two years of coalition Government, we saw Queensland produce some 40% of the new jobs in Australia—a total of 91,000 jobs—while having only 18% of the population.

The coalition Government attracted major international players to Queensland in the area of industry and development. We saw some \$16 billion worth of major projects under way or under examination. We established the best possible business environment for the creation of new jobs, particularly through responsible economic management and practical support for the business sector.

Under the coalition Government, Queensland achieved a worldwide reputation as a pro-business State. That is why it saddens me to see the Labor Government in its early weeks and months already announcing a freeze on major projects and turning its back on other projects. We had companies such as Voxson, Mack Trucks, Boeing, Comalco, Shell Coal, Dascom, John Deere, Qantas and Silicon Graphics, just to name a few, demonstrate their confidence by moving to and expanding in Queensland.

The coalition Government also successfully protected Queensland from the upheaval in Asia. Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show that merchandise exports for the first nine months of the financial year totalled nearly \$12 billion, representing a massive 18.2% increase on the same period for 1996-97. Exports for the March quarter of 1998 were up nearly 20% on the same quarter of 1997. In fact, the exports and trade figures for each of the months right through from July to March were significantly higher than those for the corresponding months of the year before. So the coalition did fireproof Queensland's economy against the upheaval in Asia through our demonstrated commitment to Asia and particularly through our trade diversification strategy, which has targeted Europe and North America and non-traditional markets such as central Europe, India, South America, South Africa and the Middle East.

I will touch on a couple of issues in the area of rural communities. One in particular is water. If one looks at the rural communities around Queensland that are resilient, flexible and succeeding, one sees that they are communities based around major irrigation and water schemes. Honourable members should go out to Goondiwindi and see the expansion in that area, or simply drive along the main street of Goondiwindi to see the new shops and businesses and to see the way Goondiwindi is thriving. A variety of enterprises is developing around Goondiwindi, along with the associated light manufacturing. Members would see farm machinery repairs, earth moving equipment, scrapers, dozers and that sort of thing. Goondiwindi really is a thriving community, based upon the water that is able to bring to fruition the cotton and other crops in that area. If honourable members look at other areas such as Gympie, the Atherton Tableland or the areas around Emerald, they will see the variety of agricultural pursuits that are able to be undertaken.

That is why the \$2.1 billion water infrastructure program the coalition was putting in place was so important to this State and to rural communities—to guarantee their survival and their growth. It was so important to farming families to enable them to expand, and expand into other crops if necessary. It was so important to trade and exports. It is from many of those irrigation areas that much of the agricultural exports and trade of Queensland come and where much of the potential lies.

Another industry that is so important to rural communities is the pork industry. Australia probably does not have any other industry that could rival the efficiency of the pork industry. It was one of the first rural industries to move out of stud breeding and into genetics—into hybrid pigs rather than exhibiting stud pigs at shows. It was one of the first industries to move into computerisation in the development of rashers and the way in which it bred and ran the pork industry. It is an industry that produces somewhere in the order of 17 or 18 pigs per sow—a massive improvement on the situation of 10 or 20 years ago. It is an industry that needs to be given breathing space as it endeavours to cope with the imports that are coming from Canada.

The pork industry has been hit by the importation regime put in place in 1990 by the Keating Government. The imports started in 1992. It is about time this industry was given the support and the

breathing space that it needs to adjust to the new arrangements and to develop exports, particularly through facilities such as KR Darling Downs in Toowoomba.

The other industry that has to be recognised for its important contribution to rural economies is the dairy industry. I am pleased that the Dairy Industry Legislation Review Committee put in place by the coalition Government was able to show the very important public worth of the dairy industry and was even able to go to towns such as Warwick, Allora, Clifton and Oakey on the Darling Downs; Monto, Murgon and Wondai in the South Burnett; and towns on the Atherton Tableland and on other parts of the coast. The monthly cheque that comes in, the way the industry is able to pay the transport industries, the irrigation, the fertiliser and the mechanical industries that support the dairy industry all contribute to the economy of the area.

If deregulation of the dairy industry were introduced, all we would see, as we have seen in other States, is a shift of income from the country towns to the three big retailers— Woolworths, Coles and Franklins. We would see the actual price of the product in the supermarkets go up. The price paid to the dairy farmers would decrease. There would be a shift of this money from little towns such as Allora and Clifton into the hands of the big supermarkets. That is the last thing we want in a decentralised State such as Queensland. It is the last thing we want when it comes to looking after our rural and regional communities.

Queensland is the only State in Australia that has more than 50% of its population living outside of the capital. The strength of Queensland has been our decentralisation— our rural towns, cities and townships. That is what really has made Queensland into a great State.

In the time I have remaining I will say a bit about my electorate of Toowoomba South and some of its pressing needs. I think those of us who represent electorates in Toowoomba feel very humbled by the support for the National Party by the people of Toowoomba. We were able to deliver on our promises while in Government and, in the years before that, in Opposition. It is a big responsibility to continue with that level of service.

The former coalition Government was particularly proud to be able to see to fruition, after years and years of promises, the new hospital complex at Toowoomba and the associated community health services. There is more work to be done, and that should be under way over the next six months. In particular, I refer to the refurbishment of the wards in the older part of the hospital and the new mental health wards. I mention also the funding that we put aside for the total redevelopment of the Baillie Henderson Hospital in the Toowoomba North electorate. I compliment my colleague the member for Toowoomba North, Graham Healy, for the way in which he was able to finally get the Wilsonton State High School for his electorate in Toowoomba. After years and years of promises from the Labor Government, he was able to deliver on that promise.

An important issue in Toowoomba is water, about which I spoke earlier. There is an organisation on the Darling Downs called Vision 2000. In common with many other cities in rural Queensland, the important thing for Toowoomba is providing water infrastructure in the surrounding rural areas, in this case the Darling Downs, because the flow-on benefits to Toowoomba are enormous. Toowoomba is a great city of almost 90,000 people, with probably another 30,000 in the immediate vicinity. It is one of the great rural capitals in Australia. It is a major centre for education, with universities, TAFE, many boarding schools and other Government and non-Government schools. As a service centre for rural industry, much of the wealth of Toowoomba depends very heavily on the feedlots, the intensive dairies and piggeries, cotton, grain and horticulture.

Vision 2000 is a group of mainly businesspeople, farmers and local government representatives who are working on getting better water supplies for the Darling Downs, which is an area that does not have major rivers. The area forms the headwaters of the Murray/Darling system—the second longest system in the world after the Nile River. The system starts behind Killarney and wanders through the Condamine system, the western Darling Downs and Dalby. It then turns south-west and ends up in the Murray/Darling system. There are no big catchments. However, there are some very innovative ways to provide sufficient water on the Darling Downs to boost almost immediately the area's production. The area has some of the best agricultural country and farmers in the world. The production levels of crops such as corn, cotton, sorghum and chickpeas are up there with the agricultural records of the world. All that is required is more water. The infrastructure, soil and farming expertise is there. It just needs water.

Over the years much has been said about the possibility of turning the floodwaters from the headwaters of the Clarence River system about 20 or 30 kilometres back through the ranges and into the Killarney area to feed the Condamine system. However, one of the exciting options being investigated by Vision 2000, and particularly as a result of some of the funds provided by the previous coalition Government, is that of waste water reuse. About 160,000 megalitres of water are used per year in Brisbane. It will cost the Brisbane City Council some \$200m to upgrade its water discharge systems. Once it has been used, none of that water is wanted; it is simply pumped away as waste water into Moreton Bay.

That water could be recycled by bringing it back, firstly, into the Lockyer Valley, which has so much potential. The ranges are relatively small and are not as high as the Toowoomba Range. From the Toowoomba Range, the water could be brought into the headwaters of some of those creeks that feed the Condamine system. That would be great environmentally and economically for the Darling Downs. That is the sort of vision that we need to have in our country if we are going to do great things, and it is a vision that I think would have the support of people from Brisbane, the Brisbane City Council, the shires and rural communities along the way, and certainly the people of the Darling Downs.

I wish also to compliment the former Minister for Sport, Mick Veivers, who is present in the Chamber, for three initiatives for which the people of Toowoomba are very grateful. I mention firstly his support for the aquatic centre in Toowoomba, which is an outstanding swimming and aquatic entertainment area. It is also utilised by people with disabilities. Secondly, back in the early seventies, the Toowoomba Hockey Association made a bold decision to move all of the clubs in Toowoomba to a new hockey complex on the western outskirts of the city. Through their own efforts and donations, they planted kikuyu grass and built a modest complex which has now grown into one of the best hockey complexes in Australia. With Minister Veivers' support, and that of the Toowoomba City Council, they were able to put in place a first-class water-based field. Seven Toowoomba hockey players are currently representing Australia in either senior men's, senior women's or junior hockey sides.

Thirdly, the Centenary Heights State School and the associated aquatic club received outstanding support from Minister Veivers, which enabled it to construct a pool that will be available not only for that school community but also for all of the other schools—the convent school across the road and the other schools on south-eastern side of Toowoomba—and for the masters and other swimming clubs.

An important initiative that the coalition Government included in the recent Budget that it introduced to the Parliament was the new police station for Toowoomba, which is desperately needed. Some \$1m was allocated in the Budget for the commencement of construction. The total project is worth some \$8m.

I wish to mention some initiatives that have been suggested by the Toowoomba Licensed Venues Association, which sometimes gets criticised for misbehaviour that occurs at night in town. Toowoomba has become a wonderful place for entertainment at night through, firstly, the Empire Theatre, which was totally redeveloped by the Toowoomba City Council. That is a place that everyone in Queensland should attend. It is a marvellous venue. Margaret Street, which is just nearby, has been redeveloped into what is called "Eat Street".

Members of the Licensed Venues Association have been suggesting some very practical improvements so that night-time behaviour in the Eat Street area of the city can be improved. It would like to see the CBD Police Beat shopfront in a more prominent position. Similar to the Brisbane Mall, we could benefit from having a police shopfront right in the middle of the town's entertainment area. Again similar to the situation in the Brisbane Mall, the association would like to see the provision of toilet facilities, late-night street food vendors, and a taxi rank positioned in Eat Street, with a more visible police presence in that area at all times, but principally on Friday and Saturday nights. If we can achieve that, it would lift the ambience of Eat Street.

I also congratulate the Toowoomba City Council on the work it is doing in redeveloping West Creek, which runs into Gowrie Creek. East Creek is one of the most beautiful attractions of Toowoomba. If we can do the same on the other side of the city through West Creek and Gowrie Creek, that would certainly help Toowoomba to maintain its garden city image.

In conclusion, I thank all of those Government employees who were of so much assistance to me as a local member.

Time expired.

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