



Speech by

**Mr. R. CONNOR**

**MEMBER FOR NERANG**

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Hansard 26 August 1998

**REVOCATION OF STATE FOREST AREAS**

**Mr CONNOR** (Nerang—LP) (2.53 p.m.): It gives me a great deal of satisfaction to support this motion, because my first involvement with this matter goes back about two years, when the then councillor for the area, Peter Panitz, came to me on behalf of the CATZ bike club at Nerang. Although it had a velodrome, it wished to build a criterium circuit beside it to take advantage of the existing facilities. For those who are not aware of what it is, I point out that a criterium circuit is basically an enclosed bitumen road circuit. It allows for demonstration-type races similar to the Tour de France but in an enclosed area. The great benefits of having an enclosed circuit are that safety is enhanced and the facility can be used for demonstration and exhibition purposes.

I need to put on the record the names of a few people who played a major role in this project. After his loss at the last council election, Peter Panitz was succeeded by Col Kleinschmidt, the Deputy Mayor of the Gold Coast, who put a great deal of effort into bringing this project to fruition. There were a number of problems along the way, not the least of which was the fact that this was going to require about a hectare of State forest. I can understand why the department felt that this was not an appropriate purpose for a State forest. However, after protracted negotiations, in which I took part, with the council and Col Kleinschmidt, we managed to strike a deal whereby a significant part of council parkland was swapped for this section of State forest.

It should also be put on record exactly what this will mean not only for the hinterland of the Gold Coast but also for the whole region. A number of Olympic teams will be using the criterium circuit in the run-up to the Olympics. In January next year the Gold Coast will get a great plug when the British cycling team sets up its training camp. In conjunction with CATZ, a number of competitions and exhibitions will be held involving cyclists such as Robbie McEwen and Stuart O'Grady. For those who do not recall, I point out that Stuart O'Grady held the yellow guernsey for three days in the Tour de France. That means that he won three stages of that event, which is the premier cycling event in the world. People such as Robbie McEwen and Stuart O'Grady will be involved in the demonstrations with the British team. The Swedish cycling team will also conduct its training at this circuit in the month leading up to the Olympics, and will also be involved in demonstration and competition events. This means that the people of the Gold Coast will be able to see some of the greatest cyclists in the world before the Olympics even begin.

This project started off as a pipedream. Ken Mitchell, the current vice-president of CATZ, and the current CEO, Geoff Frost, came up with the concept and in conjunction with Mick Veivers, the then Minister for Sport, put together a package. I should also put on record the great contribution that Mick Veivers has made to this project by providing about \$200,000 towards the circuit. As I understand it, the funding was originally going to be matched on a dollar-for-dollar basis. However, because of significant drainage costs and so on the council has had to put in significantly more than the State Government has contributed. But even so, we will have an absolutely first-class circuit.

The circuit runs beside the existing velodrome. Members may recall that not that long ago the stadium and clubhouse burned down. Through a combination of a great deal of community support and hard work by CATZ and the community that clubhouse and stadium were rebuilt and the complex is now one of the finest in Australia. When the criterium circuit is finished, the overall complex will be the premier circuit in Australia. Although the velodrome may not be of the same standard that the

international teams are used to, they will be able to utilise the slightly differently designed circuits at Chandler in Brisbane. That is no reflection on our velodrome; it is purely a different style. However, the teams will be based at the criterium circuit at Nerang.

It also needs to be put on record that the complex will be a very useful ongoing community facility in that it will also be able to be used for learning. It is a perfect place for the family to learn this type of riding because of the safety aspect—because it is enclosed. It is also going to be used by disabled athletes, and I think that that is a real feather in the club's cap because the complex has been designed with that in mind. As I mentioned earlier, it is also great for people learning to ride competitively. The club has a number of spare bikes that will be made available for school sports days and generally for schools for training and the like.

It is a great credit to the community, CATZ and others that they have put this together. I think it is worth while also putting on record just how much effort was put into getting through the paperwork—getting through the maze of regulations. Back in February last year, the then councillor Peter Panitz wrote to me in relation to this project. He had been knocking his head against the wall for some time, trying to work through this maze of paperwork—this maze of red tape. Unfortunately, even with the best of intentions, because of environmental aspects and the like at the time the Department of Natural Resources knocked back the proposal. Again, that is when I got involved.

The local councillor, who was then Col Kleinschmidt, approached me and asked if I could be of assistance. We tried to put a package together that would deal with the amenity aspect. The main difficulty that the Department of Natural Resources had was management problems. Unless it was actually taken away from the park the department would have responsibility for it, and that was going to be a problem. At the same time, they could not justify the removal of that section of the forest because it would diminish the overall amenity of the park.

That is when we came up with the concept of a swap with some council parkland. We found a piece of parkland adjoining the State forest that we saw as being totally pristine as opposed to the particular area of the State forest that we were looking at beside the velodrome. It was quite affected and had previously been the long haul site for the forestry activities, which meant that it was substantially degraded. Because we are talking about only a couple of acres—a hectare—of land in a degraded area in exchange for pristine parkland that adjoined the land, it was a significant boon for forestry.

Putting it all together, after a series of negotiations, we were able to strike a deal and this is what we are seeing today: the finalisation of a great deal of coordination and effort by a number of parties whom I have mentioned already. Again, I would like to put on record my congratulations for all that hard work. I would also like to give CATZ this plug: they are going to put together an absolutely magnificent series of events over the coming months and also in the run-up to the Olympics. I suggest to anyone who is interested in this type of sport that they take particular note that these activities will be going on. Again, I commend the efforts of all those people involved.

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