



Speech by

Mr T. MALONE

MEMBER FOR MIRANI

Hansard 30 July 1998

MOTION OF CONFIDENCE

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (11.44 p.m.): Before speaking to the motion of confidence, I would like to congratulate all the new members who have graced this House on its sitting and congratulate them on gaining a seat in this Parliament. I would just like to reassure them that the privilege they have of joining this Parliament is great. It is something that they need to take into consideration when they work around their electorate and understand that the position of a parliamentarian is not all that it seems sometimes.

As Russell Cooper has said, quite often it takes a very heavy toll on our families, our children and our loved ones. Often the role of a parliamentarian is not as clear cut as we would all like to see. Sometimes the decisions we have to make as we move into this role are not those we would like to make. I can assure the new politicians in this House that I am aware that they will have to make those decisions, and I hope that they are able to do that with the good grace of being a politician. I can recollect the time that I made my maiden speech, and I can assure honourable members that it was a difficult time, and I was very proud to do that. I am sure that most of the new members here tonight who have made their maiden speeches and those who will make them later are also very proud to be able to do that.

It was towards the end of May in 1994 that I joined the esteemed members in the House. In actual fact, I faced three elections in four years, so I would assume I am well equipped to handle an election. I have to say that this last election was one of the most difficult elections that I have seen simply because almost all of the issues that were raised around the electorate were not of the State's doing. Indeed, just about every issue that came before me in my electorate was to do with a Federal issue. It was a very difficult election to actually get a grip on because we were not really equipped to handle the questions relating to the Federal Government.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would ask that you pass on my best regards to Speaker Hollis. He is certainly going to have a different and difficult role in this new Parliament. I would like respectfully to offer my best wishes to Neil Turner for the great role that he played in this House over a long period of time. In my younger days I can recollect Neil Turner as the Primary Industries Minister who travelled extensively throughout Queensland, trying to get some answers in regard to the sugar industry. I remember Neil pulling his hair out quite frequently in trying to understand the sugar industry. Those members who deal with the sugar industry would understand that its members have differing views according to where they come from. Quite often the views of the northern canegrowers are quite different from those of the southern canegrowers. When one is trying to deal with that as a State issue, it becomes very difficult.

Mr Littleproud interjected.

Mr MALONE: As I say, growers are different and the sugar industry is one of those industries that also has a manufacturing component, which makes it even more difficult. I have to say that Neil held that position with great esteem and he was well regarded. Even though he had some difficulties in handling it, he was held in high regard by the industry. I had travelled in recent times with Neil. He is always a very gracious and great man to travel with. He is a great bloke. The work that he has done in this Parliament over the past couple of years surely would invoke in honourable members a great

respect for him. This Parliament should certainly be very appreciative of the work that Neil Turner has put into this House.

It gives me no joy to speak to this confidence motion tonight that is before the House. I served as a proud member of the coalition Government for two and a quarter years. I believe we achieved so much for the State of Queensland in that period of time and I believe we are ready to do it again or to continue doing it. In just two and a quarter years, the State of Queensland moved forward productively and innovatively in a mode in which enormous inroads were made into many areas that I would like to detail.

I believe that many of the achievements that we gained in Government were of great benefit to my electorate and the central Queensland region which I represent. We had tremendous infrastructure development— roads, bridges, highways and, in particular, the start of the small boat harbour in Mackay, which had probably been on the books for 30 years or more. We had water conservation projects such as dams, weirs and innovative work in regard to grey water use and such things. These were coming on line. We had hospital and health related services that were coming on stream. We had transport infrastructure development.

In the area of law and order we introduced tougher legislation. In the short time during which we were in Government we dealt with the four large Acts which handle law and order, and I refer to the Criminal Code, the Juvenile Justice Act, the Police Powers and Responsibilities Act and the Penalties and Sentences Act. These were the four cornerstones of the Coalition Government's law and order platform.

Russell Cooper was exclusively responsible for supplying increased police numbers. Police numbers were massively increased right throughout Queensland. The establishment of the Police Academy at Townsville had a great bearing on this increase. It was a great step in the right direction. We needed to get those police officers out on the street as quickly as possible.

In the area of education, the coalition Government supplied additional teachers, new schools and increased resources. This all augured well for the young in our community. We had funding to rural communities for water supplies and sewerage works. In my electorate, we had halls and sporting infrastructure to communities with fewer than 10,000 people. In Emergency Services we saw a massive increase in the number of units and the amount of equipment supplied to rural fire brigades. This was due to the hard work of my colleague former Minister Veivers. This was combined with additional equipment and manpower in both the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority and the Queensland Ambulance Service. The list goes on, but I will not continue because it has been outlined by previous speakers.

Before a Government can have the confidence of this Parliament it must show integrity. It must have the ability to listen and deliver to all Queenslanders. The key word is "all". For six long years—from 1990 to 1996—regional communities, such as those in the Mirani electorate, played second fiddle to the major metropolitan areas. As has been mentioned, we suffered loss of services with the closure of railway stations, courthouses and rail services and the loss of railway jobs.

In 1995 Queenslanders lost faith in the Goss Government and they showed that loss of faith overwhelmingly. Again in 1998 the voters showed that they had no faith in the Labor side of politics with less than 39% voting for Labor. In the 1995 election the coalition held Government with 54% of the vote.

Some of the significant achievements of the coalition Government occurred in the area of primary industries. Under the Labor Government the Department of Primary Industries was gutted. Research and extension staff were slashed by almost 700 full-time positions in six years. What an abhorrent disregard for an industry that is the economic backbone of this State. Billions of dollars of income are attributable to primary industries right throughout Queensland. In just over two years, the Borbidge coalition was able to redress the situation in the Department of Primary Industries by employing almost 600 full-time staff, with more to come. This occurred because we recognised the importance of primary producers and the need to look after their livelihood and their families. The Government was able to create jobs in areas where quite often there were no jobs.

Three successive Budgets increased the DPI budget. That action has increased morale no end. A rural industries export development unit was established to help existing and new primary industries maximise our enormous export potential. Just some of those included the development of aquaculture and small crops. We set up industry-based institutes for forestry, food and technology, horticulture, farming systems, beef, sheep and wool, pigs, dairying and poultry.

One of the major achievements of the coalition was handing back the bulk sugar terminals to the sugar industry. This was something that Labor was not able to do in six years, even though Labor made the commitment in 1990 under the changes to the Sugar Industry Act. Ed Casey, as Minister for Primary Industries, was never able to do that. It was very fortunate that the coalition was able to pull all

that together and make it happen. It is one of the cornerstones of the sugar industry that the industry now has full access to the wharves.

With an eye to being world leaders in climate research, the coalition set up the Centre for Climate Applications, which will study the most advanced forecasting methods with a view to assisting primary producers. The implementation of export parity pricing for the sugar industry was also a great step. The guarantee of single desk selling for Queensland sugar was something that went against the competition policy with which we are now faced, but the sugar industry has done it. This is a cornerstone in ensuring that the sugar industry will continue to play a major part in Queensland's economy.

The coalition introduced new planning legislation which ensured the existing rights of farmers against potential urban encroachment were preserved. The Integrated Planning Act put in place sensible development plans which are critical for the future of our rural and urban development.

The coalition understood the absolute need for water if our primary producers are to succeed and grow. During the worst drought ever in Queensland, the Goss Labor Government spent a record low on developing future water infrastructure to minimise the effect of drought. The coalition responded quickly and implemented a \$1 billion 12-year water infrastructure program. This was matched by a further \$1 billion in private investment.

In the Mirani electorate these benefits had already started to flow through with the raising of the Dumbleton Weir near Mackay. The storage of the weir was increased by 4,000 megalitres. We had in place the development of feasibility studies for the Finch Hatton dam. Sadly, this has been axed by Labor already, even before the studies were completed. We also had further studies into the St Helens dam site and the raising of the Kinchant Dam. I hope the Labor Government is able to progress those through to completion.

The coalition helped farmers with the establishment of the water development incentive program, which provided a 22% subsidy for on-farm irrigation storage costing \$200,000 or more. We had an election commitment to reduce this threshold to \$75,000 to make access for cane farmers and smaller operators much easier. This was well received right throughout Queensland and it would have been a great achievement. It would have enabled smaller sized farms to develop their own irrigation supplies. Most farmers throughout Queensland were excited about this initiative. I hope that the new Government will follow it through.

If ever there was a case of inheriting a rotting carcass, it was when the coalition took over the Health portfolio in 1996. The Health budget was increased from \$2.7 billion in Labor's last term to \$3.6 billion in the coalition's 1998-99 Budget. This included an \$85m boost to mental health funding. In 1996, the State Government embarked on a massive \$2.4 billion capital works program to redevelop the State's 125 public hospitals and community health centres. Within the Mirani electorate alone this included a \$26m redevelopment of the Mackay Base Hospital and a \$600,000 upgrade at the Sarina Hospital. The upgrade at the Sarina Hospital included a rehabilitation unit which was one of the very few places in Queensland where accident and stroke victims could get back on their feet and return to a decent style of living. This project is almost complete and, hopefully, it will continue. In 1995, Queensland had the worst Category 1 waiting times of anywhere in Australia. Now we have the best. The coalition delivered more than 1,400 extra doctors, nurses, allied health professionals and other health worker positions throughout Queensland.

In Education, our Leading Schools program is about performance, not mythical elitism, as the new Minister suggests. It is about encouraging schools to strive for achievement. Leading Schools was about community input and about local school communities having a say. The Walkerston State School was one of the first Leading Schools in my electorate. It gained many benefits through that program.

Mr Fenlon: Tell us about the schools that missed out.

Mr MALONE: All schools are now going to get this program, and they will all be mediocre schools. Instead of trying to strive, they will all be the same. That is great!

The coalition approved 28 new schools right across the State, including Marian and Beaconsfield in my Mirani electorate. We have two new schools that will be ready to commence in the 1999 school year. They will be state-of-the-art schools with all the latest technology. The coalition increased the Education budget by 15%, representing \$440m and an extra 1,022 teachers. It introduced postgraduate teacher scholarships to encourage the very best people to become specialist teachers in many needy areas. It assisted up to 900 teachers across the State by extending the Remote Area Incentive Scheme to teachers. That scheme was aimed at attracting and keeping quality teachers in non-metropolitan areas.

As to Emergency Services—I am pleased to be the Opposition shadow spokesman for Emergency Services. I recognise the work of the previous Minister for Emergency Services. He certainly made an outstanding effort—in contrast to Labor's bad management of that portfolio. One of Labor's first election promises was free ambulance services to pensioners. All the election hype has suddenly

come home to haunt the Premier and his new Minister. The first action in this portfolio has been to delay that promise and put it back to 1 January 1999. It is quite disappointing from my perspective that the elderly in our community have been deceived in this manner. It is a real pity. Many elderly people in my community voted Labor simply because they knew that they were going to get free ambulance services.

Mr Briskey: And they'll get it.

Mr MALONE: That is fine. But this Government has broken its promise. That is the most important part.

It is a pity that Labor has chosen to target this portfolio as a pretext for why it will not be able to fund its election promises. Barely is the seat warm and the Minister and the Premier are claiming that there would be a \$6m hole in this budget. The new Minister has brought pure politics into the debate. It is a tragic pity that the previous Minister put the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority board in place to stop this political bias. This is a very convenient excuse to try to brush off an election debt—a debt which the Treasury itself had predicted Labor's promises would create.

Already the games are being played by the Premier and this Minister through distorting and questioning the integrity of management, which has resulted in a declining morale within the department. This is a tragedy, as the coalition Government worked hard to restore the waning morale and the shattered public image of emergency services that existed under the Goss Government for many years. Instead of making insinuations, instead of whingeing and whining, the coalition got on with the job. We were a Government that exceeded expectations. We exceeded our own promises, and we delivered.

Time expired.
