



Speech by

Miss FIONA SIMPSON

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard 2 & 3 March 1999

ADDRESS IN REPLY

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (5.54 p.m.): As a constitutional monarchist with a healthy distrust of Labor lawyers who want to take away the checks and balances in our current Australian Constitution, I would like to reaffirm my parliamentary oath in regard to my loyalty to the Australian Queen and also to our stable system of government.

I would like to address some issues in my own electorate. Firstly, I want to praise the community around the North Arm area in regard to the new school oval that they have managed to build with considerable voluntary assistance in the way of engineering, surveying and earthmoving. I would like to put on the parliamentary record my thanks to Mr Noel Covey and his business for their help in coordinating this voluntary project. Quite a team of people was involved in making this possible. We must realise that some of these schools have only a couple of hundred students. In this case the school involved did not even have a township from which to seek business sponsorship. Under those circumstances it is difficult to do things, but this is a great school. The people worked hard and supported each other well. It is such a delight to see members of the community come forward and make such things possible. It was a great effort.

I would also like to put on the parliamentary record that we need a greater appreciation of ecotourism on the Sunshine Coast. I will be pursuing further how we can develop a quality network of walking tracks to such a standard as that of the famous Milford Track in New Zealand. Obviously the area of the Milford Track is extremely beautiful, but I believe that on the Sunshine Coast we have outstanding natural features that could be better marketed to Australia and the world.

Our hiking tracks on the Sunshine Coast are not as well known to the public but they are quite beautiful. We can do so much more in the way of marketing these hiking tracks and allowing people to get into the great outdoors. In this way people will be able to appreciate the jewels that we have on our doorstep. There has been a lot of talk about developing tracks from Noosa south. I believe that we need to link the hinterland to the coast. We need to link the range with Maroochydore and other coastal centres. We have magnificent forestry areas that bridge the gap between some of these townships. We need to work hard to bring this to the notice of the wider community. People need to be encouraged to get outside their four walls and get back into the great outdoors. Hopefully they will visit the Sunshine Coast, spend their money along the way, and tell people from overseas what a great area we have.

Another important issue in my area is roads. Being in one of the fastest growing areas in Australia, we have challenges of growth. I am concerned that we have a very flood-prone major arterial road between Nambour and Maroochydore. Whenever we have the slightest flood this road is cut and people have to take quite circuitous alternative routes to get to the Nambour Hospital. Clearly this is unacceptable. We need a flood-free arterial network on the Sunshine Coast to deal with major emergencies. We do not even have an adequate road network to deal with minor flooding.

Maroochydore Road from the industrial area west between Kunda Park and the Bruce Highway must be upgraded. The current time frame is not acceptable. It must be fast-tracked. I will continue to pursue this matter with the Government because roads are not only our business lifeline but they are also our social lifeline. We have a major hospital in Nambour but the growth centres are on the coast and we do not have adequate linkage between them. It is imperative that action is taken very quickly to address this matter.

I would also like to address the ongoing issue of the public transit corridor feasibility study, otherwise known as CAMCOS, which has gone on for far too long under the previous Government and under this Government. A lot of money has been paid to consultants but the people have not been consulted. It has gone off track and it has focused mainly on heavy rail. If it was a true feasibility study it would be looking at all public transit options including busways. I have a personal preference for busways but I believe that this feasibility study was always meant to investigate all public transit options. That has not happened. Heavy rail will never be viable if it simply carries passengers; it will have to rely on freight. People are terrified that they will have heavy rail coming through their houses or past their back doors. I believe there are far more environmentally friendly options which a proper feasibility study should take into account.

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (11.30 a.m.): Much has been said in the past few days about the drug problem. We must have zero tolerance of people who cunningly and deliberately entice young people into a drug lifestyle for their own selfish personal gain. We can sugarcoat it and point to extenuating circumstances until the cows come home, but drug pushing still remains one of the most wickedly destructive things that one human being can do to another. We need to display tolerance for people who have been caught in the web of drug and alcohol addiction and who want to get out of that lifestyle.

The coalition had an anti-drug strategy. The current Government is carrying on much of that program, but I know that the Naltrexone rapid detoxification trial is running about seven months behind schedule under the current Health Minister, Wendy Edmond. That trial is very important because we must be looking for new and better alternative treatment programs to assist people to get off heroin. The Opposition will be watching the continuation of that program with great interest.

Recently we have seen quite a lot of controversy about the needle exchange program. In fact, some 3,000 needles were found dumped in a park in Brisbane. In November last year I asked the Health Minister for data on the needle exchange program in Queensland. This was after I had heard that on the Sunshine Coast there was almost a doubling in the number of needles handed out through one program. Unfortunately, the Minister treated the House with utter contempt in her reply tabled on 21 December. She failed to answer any of the questions before the Parliament.

There is bipartisan support for seeing something done about drugs in this State. We need to educate people and support the rehabilitation program. But when we asked for basic data about what is happening with needle exchange programs in Queensland the Minister failed to answer. We need to know exactly what is happening with this program because something is awfully wrong when we see large numbers of needles being dumped in public places. The dumping of needles creates a risk to people who are not involved in the taking of illicit drugs. Surely the general public has a right to be protected. I renew my call to the Minister. We must have an independent audit of the needle exchange program. It is not good enough for the Minister to continue to bury her head in the sand. This issue concerns everyone in the community.

Although the needle exchange program has had some very good outcomes in certain health indicators, such as reinfection rates of certain diseases, unfortunately there are other indicators that are not built into the process. We have no knowledge of the morbidity rate of people who have been on those programs. We need to know the percentage of people who are accessing counselling in an attempt to move away from this lifestyle. Surely the focus should be always addressed to getting people out of this lifestyle. We must provide people with the appropriate rehabilitation so that, when they want to get away from drugs, they know that there is a program that will help them. We must ensure that such services are available.

We need information on the extent of the problem. A lot of the information we have is anecdotal. Until the public receives the information it will be hard for communities to understand the extent of the problem. It is a problem that touches all areas of society. Drugs affect people who struggle economically as well as those who are very well off. It affects people of all races and creeds. I have talked to various families and have been amazed at the terrible situations that have occurred in relation to children. Children with bright and promising futures have had their lives destroyed. Some of these children have ended up in the jail system, while others have overdosed. This causes ongoing trauma to the whole family.

On the Sunshine Coast a group was recently formed in an attempt to found a rehabilitation centre. I fully support that move. From the figures which have been made public we know that the problem is extremely widespread. I urge the Minister to look at this group's submission for funding. The Minister needs to undertake an audit of the available services. Governments need to work in partnership with the community on an issue such as this. When people from across the community are prepared to come together and raise funds and coordinate voluntary services, the Government has to grab that interest and run with it. We must work with those people. I believe that an audit of the services available will enable various organisations to obtain State and Federal funding.

Another issue I would like to raise concerns the Sunshine Coast Convention Centre project. It appears that funding has been secured for a feasibility study. This project has in-principle support right across politics. The tourism market has many sectors but we need to look at the value added aspects of tourism as well. The convention market offers a lot of opportunity. The Sunshine Coast is a fast-growing area with a great airport and a lot of natural beauty. It is also close to Brisbane. However, it has been under-represented in the market for conventions. The facilities currently available cannot handle the size of conventions that we need to make a difference to Sunshine Coast tourism. I will continue to support those members of the community who are lobbying for a convention centre because it is something that will benefit the entire Sunshine Coast. Obviously, we are keen to see it happen in the middle of Maroochydore. We want to see people coming to our area, enjoying the natural beauty, the great shopping and all the other attributes of the area and spending their money. This will create jobs for our young people.
