



Speech by

HARRY BLACK

MEMBER FOR WHITSUNDAY

Hansard 3 March 1999

ADDRESS IN REPLY

Mr BLACK (Whitsunday—ONP) (3.29 p.m.): Today I take the opportunity provided by the Address in Reply debate to pledge my loyalty to Her Majesty the Queen and also to pay tribute to the Governor and thank him for his blessing of this House. I thank the people of Whitsunday for having faith in me and electing me to this Parliament. After nine years of travail and the handicap of having a Labor representative, the people are now enjoying the dedicated representation of a One Nation member. I thank my wife, Veronica, and my adult family—David, Dianne and Sandra—for their support. I thank also my campaign manager, Frank Collingwood, and the many enthusiastic and hardworking helpers who made my election possible.

In addition to being one of the most beautiful areas in Queensland, the electorate of Whitsunday is possibly one of the most diverse in the State. Major industries in our district include tourism, cane growing, sugar milling, small crop growing, coalmining, power generation and beef cattle production. There is also a meatworks at Bowen, which was originally owned by Thomas Borthwick and Sons—a family company—which now of course is under Japanese control. It is quite an efficient meatworks, but the great tragedy is that, because of an ongoing dispute and the apparent reluctance of the company to negotiate with the workers, it lies idle, having cost the jobs of 400 local people. The ramifications are enormous not only for the retrenched meatworkers and their families but also for the employers and employees of the vast number of associated businesses and also the cattle producers from Proserpine, Collinsville and Bowen.

Climatic and seasonal conditions in this area can be very extreme, with droughts quite often followed by torrential rain and severe flooding. However, cattlemen are a resilient lot. They have an incredible ability to cope with anything nature can throw at them and even most things that uncaring Governments have inflicted upon them. But they certainly do not need the added impost of extra transport costs when marketing their cattle further afield. The irony is that the same company owns the meatworks in Mackay, which is still operating and providing the same enormous economic benefits to that community that are now denied to the people of the Whitsunday electorate.

Tourism is another major employer in the Whitsundays, with major resorts on the northern beaches of Mackay, Laguna Quays at Midge Point, Airlie Beach, Bowen and the world-class resorts on the beautiful Whitsunday islands. I call on the Minister for Tourism to provide any assistance he can in developing the outstanding potential of these water-based tourism opportunities. The economic contribution to the region and to the State of Queensland that is derived from tourism in my electorate would be considerably higher than the State average of one job for every nine. The opportunities for ecotourism are enormous, and with support and encouragement it will be a major contributor to the regional and State economies.

Twenty years ago the resorts closed through the wet season, making tourism very seasonal. With aquatic facilities now complemented by land-based attractions, such as the ability to experience working cattle properties and other rural pursuits, we have attractions to suit anyone in basically all types of weather. The ecotourism sector needs a kick-start, and it is very important that this opportunity is not missed; as the Premier well knows, tourism means jobs, jobs, jobs.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the sterling efforts of Mario Demartini, the Mayor of the Shire of Whitsunday, and his councillors and staff; Mike Brunner, the Mayor of Bowen Shire, his

councillors and staff; and Julie Boyd, the Mayor of the Mackay City Council, and her councillors and staff. Those three local government areas make up the electorate of Whitsunday.

All of our primary industries have suffered difficult times, both in terms of seasonal difficulties and declining commodity prices. Over the past six months, the sugar industry in particular has suffered greatly due to unseasonal rain, which has meant that a vast amount of cane has been left in the paddocks. The price of sugar is at an all-time low, and this means that fewer dollars will be spent.

The Bowen and Collinsville areas have available good farming land, but it needs water. I believe that either the Urana dam proposal or the Burdekin channel need to be looked at urgently. The potential for jobs in this area is enormous.
