



Speech by

**JEFF KNUTH**

**MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN**

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Hansard 1 December 1999

### **TOWNSVILLE INDUSTRIAL PARK**

**Mr KNUTH** (Burdekin—IND) (6.01 p.m.): I move—

"That this Parliament recommends the relocation of the proposed Townsville Industrial Park from Woodstock to Abbot Point, Bowen on the basis of better infrastructure, less environmental impact, and greater local economic need."

There are some serious flaws in relation to the process of strategic planning involved in the Townsville industrial land project. It has been irresponsible from the outset due to the fact that only the Townsville/Thuringowa area was explored as a suitable site. The Department of State Development is struggling to find a credible parcel of land on which to fit the criteria of heavy industry.

It would be ludicrous to place a population density of 100,000-plus citizens in such close proximity to the potential health risks that would revolve around this enterprise. Establishing 10 to 20 heavy industries within the confines of a 3,500-hectare parcel of land would mean that emissions and effluent run-off would be concentrated in hazardous amounts. This poses not only a health risk but also an environmental risk in a successful agricultural area.

On 21 November 1996, McWilliams Consulting Engineers were commissioned by the Department of State Development to assess the Townsville/Thuringowa area for a site selection report for heavy industry. By August 1997, an area selection report identified an 11,000-hectare area at Woodstock. The people who live in the area have reported that there was no public input involved in this matter and it is widely accepted that, obviously, there was no visual assessment of the area.

As a rational thinker, I would have thought that, if one wanted to acquire a parcel of land, it would be essential to have a look at the land. In August 1997, the citizens occupying the 11,000 hectares were notified through the local newspaper that their security was being taken away from them.

**Mr Reynolds:** Why do you want to take Townsville jobs down to Bowen?

**Mr KNUTH:** Why do you want a polluted water supply? This project created much hostility, thereby restricting the ability of those involved to undertake a responsible and diligent study of the area. The consultants were on the back foot from the start.

As a result of the actions of the Department of State Development, the properties at Woodstock have been devalued and the confidence of the citizens has been compromised. The local residents are hesitant to improve their properties for the future because of the uncertainty about ownership hanging over their heads. It is a diverse community containing pioneering families, retirees, general working class citizens and citizens obtaining a living from the land.

Families have been occupying freehold land in this area for over 100 years. It has taken four lifetimes of blood, sweat and tears and a great deal of personal hardship to build up the local businesses to the standard that they have achieved today. All this could be lost as a result of the State Government choosing an unsuitable site. The ability to pass down the property to the fifth generation could be lost forever.

Even citizens not directly affected by the land grab, but who live adjacent to the site, will have the security of raising their children in a clean, healthy, rural environment taken away from them. The confidence of this community has been undermined for 27 months. This is freehold land, and the people involved should have the right to do as they wish upon their land. At this stage they do not have any rights.

The very hollow, inconclusive report on the Woodstock site does not contain any reference to the suitability of the site for an industrial complex. The words "most suitable" are frequently used. It appears that this site was chosen for convenience, without the real concerns of environmental and social impacts being addressed.

The proposed Townsville industrial land project is at the headwaters of two major water catchments, namely the Ross River Dam and the Haughton River. The Ross River Dam provides the drinking water for 100,000-plus unwary citizens. The Haughton River is the lifeblood of a \$150m agricultural industry—namely the Invicta mill—as well as supplying the drinking water for the township of Giru. The potential for future disaster far outweighs the argument of convenience in relation to this site.

Because the site is in close proximity to the large population of the Townsville/Thuringowa area, the potential for disaster is enormous. The quality of the drinking water and the air that people breathe puts an enormous number of people at risk. The airshed studies are inconclusive. The boundaries of the proposed site run along the bank of Landsdowne Creek, which is a direct feeder to the Ross River Dam. The groundwater is at risk of contamination because the soils on this site are permeable. This matter has to be addressed. There is no reticulated water system in the Woodstock community and most of the residents drink underground water. The water is also used for agricultural pursuits.

The Haughton River catchment, the Ross River Dam catchment and the Serpentine Wetland national heritage-listed area are at risk from direct run-off. It is admitted in the draft report that a sludge of pollutants will exist. The likely consequence is irreversible damage to something that must be preserved for future generations.

The suitability of the site is questionable because of the inconclusiveness of the studies conducted on the 3,500-hectare site. Apparently, McWilliams admit that they thought that the landowners involved were unapproachable; hence they were not consulted. How could this have been a conclusive study?

In January 1992, the State planning authority recommended the protection of good quality agricultural land. In August 1997, guidelines were released for separating agricultural land uses from other land uses. This industrial project is contrary to the aims of this policy, because the proposed site contains good quality agricultural land. We have extensive agricultural pursuits carried out along the Haughton River catchment. In this area we have potato farming, smallcropping, orchards and an extensive sugar industry which generates in excess of \$150m per annum for the Australian economy.

The Woodstock Action Group has raised all these issues with the Department of State Development, but the department is still determined to place heavy industry in this unsuitable site purely as a matter of convenience. There are far more suitable sites within the reach of convenient infrastructure and the large provincial city of Townsville. There is a very suitable site in the Bowen Shire. Development of this site would be extremely beneficial to the surrounding townships.

Since being elected to a rural constituency, I have listened to the meaningless bleatings of the Premier about his concern for rural and regional Queensland. Quite obviously, these bleatings are nothing but empty rhetoric. Here we have an industrial project being pushed into prime agricultural land against the wishes of the community, whilst the nearby Bowen district is crying out for the jobs that could be provided by this project.

The Bowen district has suitable land, a port, a power station, coalmines, road and rail links and, most importantly, the need for job creating industries. If the Premier is fair dinkum about caring for the bush, and if members of his Government really care, they will vote for this motion.

I have lived in Bowen and Collinsville for some 11 years. The people in that area are normal working class people. They are very keen to have this project sited in that area. Bowen and Collinsville are traditionally Labor-supporting towns. Is this Government going to ignore the people of those towns? These are rural people. The meatworks has closed down, the power station was closed down and reopened with a skeleton staff, the work force at the mines has been reduced and both towns are dying. This industrial project would breathe new life into these towns.

**Mr Reynolds** interjected.

**Mr KNUTH:** It is not simplicity. The member for Townsville is just pleasing his hacks. That is all he is doing. Big business has their interest in this project. He is supporting big business in Townsville. These people at Woodstock do not want this project.

**Mr Reynolds:** I am supporting jobs for Townsville people.

**Mr KNUTH:** No, I am supporting jobs for the Burdekin and rural and regional Queensland, which I represent.

**Mr Reynolds:** You represent Townsville as well.

**Mr KNUTH:** The people of my electorate in Townsville do not want this project. That is why they have come to me. The people at Alligator Creek, the people at Wulguru, the people at Oak Valley and

the people at Woodstock do not want this project. I am not anti-Townsville. These people are asking me to get this project down to Bowen. So I am not anti-Townsville at all.

**Mr Reynolds:** You are anti-Townsville.

**Mr KNUTH:** These people from Townsville, whom the member for Townsville claims he represents, are asking me to do something about this project. So I am pushing for this project to be taken down to rural Bowen and Collinsville, where it is needed desperately. That is what I am supporting. I am supporting the bush, I am supporting jobs and I am supporting rural Queensland.

This Government tries to tell this Parliament that it is concerned about the future of the people in the bush. I am also concerned about their future. As their member, I am representing them 100%. I do not blame the member for Townsville for getting upset. However, I am representing my electorate and I will do so against his wishes.

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