



Speech by

Mrs J. SHELDON

MEMBER FOR CALOUNDRA

Hansard 3 March 1999

ADDRESS IN REPLY

Mrs SHELDON (Caloundra—LP) (3.50 p.m.): I welcome this opportunity to speak in the Address in Reply debate. At the outset, I express my respect and best wishes to our Governor, Peter Arnison, and to his wife, Barbara. They are to be congratulated on the work they do, on the role they play in our community, on the respect they have from the community and on the very professional manner in which they give considerably of their time. I think we are very fortunate to have such a great Governor and his wife doing the job they do for us.

I will concentrate on a number of issues pertinent to the electorate of Caloundra. I am very thankful to the members of my constituency that in the last election they saw fit to re-elect me with an increase in my majority of over 2%. I think that is a pretty fair result in light of the fact that the great majority of seats right across the spectrum lost quite considerable percentages.

Caloundra is a growing electorate. It is in one of the fastest growing corridors in the State. As such, there is a great need for services and for infrastructure. I have been very conscious of this since becoming a member of Parliament, and in Government I tried to correct the wrongs that had occurred when Labor was in Government. These wrongs were virtually to ignore the seat of Caloundra, to ignore justice and equity and to not give the people equity and their rights when it came to services and to infrastructure. In the time the coalition was in Government I tried to right that wrong, and we are currently seeing some of the fruits of that.

I will discuss the situation in regard to a possible rail corridor on the Sunshine Coast. Many years ago, when I was president of the Chamber of Commerce and Bruce Laming was a member of the Caloundra City Council, the concept of putting aside a rail corridor on the Sunshine Coast was put forward. It is a growing area and community. We knew that there would be a need and we wanted the corridor put down while it could be put down, through areas that were predominantly government-owned forest areas and areas where development may occur but at that stage had not. This would have caused minimum disruption to the people who lived in these areas all the way up the coast.

At that stage it was envisaged that the rail line would come in from Landsborough, go up through near Corbould Park, cross the highway, go into the multimodal corridor which has been subsequently designated on the north side of the Caloundra Road, swing up through the back of Kawana Estate's development, go into the back area of Maroochydyore and then go back out to the main Nambour line at some point.

As members would know, there was a railway to the Gold Coast. That has been put down again and subsequently reopened. It is obviously a very good service to those people. With the growth that is predicted to occur on the Sunshine Coast, it is vital that we have such a corridor and such a railway servicing the area. That is the background to this issue. Nothing had been done. When we came to Government I asked the then Minister, Vaughan Johnson, if he would speed up the process of putting down this corridor so that developers proposing developments and councils drawing up city plans would be able to say, "This is where the corridor will be when the time is right—when there is the need and when the population has grown to that level."

What was put in place then is commonly known as CAMCOS. That was a group of Transport officials and consultants called Ove Arup. Its charter was to consult with the community, as must be done under departmental guidelines, and find out what the people of the Sunshine Coast required and

the best place for this corridor. It was certainly given a directive that there had to be absolutely minimum to nil interruption of the lives of people who currently live in that area.

It finally came back with three options. I will deal with the options as they affect the electorate of Caloundra. Other members may well wish to speak on how the corridor options would affect their north coast electorates. CAMCOS came back with the finding that there would be a rail corridor starting not from Landsborough but in fact at Beerwah. I know that the people in Landsborough were a little concerned about this because they felt Landsborough would be a reasonable place to start. They have a growing corridor town there. Possibly we need more information from CAMCOS about that. Currently, however, all the corridors would start at Beerwah. The contentious situation in Caloundra is that there are two or, in the consultant's words, two and a half corridors to be considered for the Caloundra part of this rail corridor.

I will give a brief outline of the proposed routes. The first would come in from Beerwah, go in at the back of Pelican Waters, go in at the back of Golden Beach, cross Caloundra Road near the Nicklin Way, go across—it would have to be on a gradient—industrial land currently mainly owned by the council but also privately owned, tunnel through Sugarbag Road, which is predominantly rock and has residents on and around it, and then come out the other side into what is currently now called the Aroona corridor. When I first saw that option I had grave concerns, and I will discuss them further in a moment.

The other corridor option would come in from Beerwah, come through what is predominantly Government reserve forest and land that is owned by developers but does not have development plans currently approved—still, that is for the future—come near Corbould Park racecourse so that it could be accessed by the racing fraternity, which is very keen to have that there, cross Caloundra Road, hook into the designated multimodal corridor and proceed north.

Mr Nuttall: That is a better option.

Mrs SHELDON: It is a much better option. It would seem, though nobody will say so, that there is a preference on the part of CAMCOS for the eastern option, and that is the one that concerns my constituents. It is no wonder they are concerned. This Caloundra West/Aroona option, if that is what comes about, would affect a number of people in that area. These people bought their homes in the full knowledge—and it was told to them—that this was a very peaceful area. Many of them look out onto rainforest at the back of their homes. That area has been there for some time. Quite a bit of it is owned by the council and has been designated in the future to be park reserve. It is obviously park now. The home owners bought there for the reason that this is a lovely quiet, peaceful area in which to bring up their children. These are hardworking men and women who mostly have their life savings in their homes and are currently working to pay off their homes. Now they find that they may have a corridor in their backyards.

I do not believe that this injustice can be allowed to occur. I ask members to look at the process that has taken place. Their concerns and my concerns are that inadequate information has been given to those people. Yes, CAMCOS went through a prescribed form of consultation. Advertisements were placed in newspapers. There were also some advertisements on the radio. This went on over a period of time. But this was a three-staged development, and the third stage was to be when a corridor option was going to be selected. At that stage, people themselves personally had to be informed.

My concern was that we can put advertisements in newspapers, but a lot of people do not buy newspapers. We can say things on the radio, but people will hear them only if they are listening to that particular radio program. Very little information was put on television. A shopfront was set up in Caloundra—because I asked for that—setting out the options on a map. But as for information to the individual constituents, that very obviously did not occur.

When we were in Government, I had various meetings with the Minister, with my director-general, with Vaughan Johnson's director-general and with operatives from CAMCOS. Both Vaughan Johnson and I expressed our concerns about how the Caloundra West/Aroona option would affect the lives of those people. We asked that they be adequately informed so that they could lodge submissions, but this just did not occur.

I had a meeting with CAMCOS on 18 December during which I raised my concerns about this. I asked could the homes that would be adversely affected be letterbox dropped. And by "adversely affected", I meant not just those under the railway line who will be paid out when their properties are resumed, but all the constituents whose homes border the corridor, who will be adversely affected by noise pollution, by visual pollution and by devaluation of their properties. Those people will get no compensation, and that is the great majority of the people who will be affected. I asked for a letterbox drop, which would include a letter from me, to be done to those people. I said, "If you can't do this, if you give me the information I will post it to every resident. You give me their names." I was told by CAMCOS that this could affect people in a 500-metre corridor on either side of the actual prescribed corridor. That came, in their own words, to between 700 and 800 people.

That letterbox drop was considerably delayed. The fact was that, when a newsletter went out, it stated that the cut-off time for when people could lodge submissions of objection would be 22 December. After consultation with me, CAMCOS and the Minister agreed that that would be extended to the end of January. By 21 January, there had still been no letterbox drop. So I asked for that to be extended to the end of February. CAMCOS then did a letterbox drop to those people and I wrote individually to all those people. That was when their real concerns started because, in their own words, that was the first time that they had been adequately informed and could lodge submissions and objections to CAMCOS.

I then asked for the time for submissions to be extended until the end of February, because the information did not arrive until the last week in January. At a public meeting of these residents—and the residents have got themselves into a very well-organised action group that does not want that corridor—they asked whether the process could be extended until the end of March so that they had adequate time within which to lodge their submissions. Let us face it, we are not looking at putting a rail line down there—in the words of CAMCOS—until the end of 2010 or 2011. That is an option that they see in the future.

What must happen is that these people must be listened to. It has been said—and it has been attributed to the consultants, but I have not been told this personally by them—that sometimes the minority has to suffer for the greater good. Frankly, I do not think that is good enough. I believe that when people have bought their homes in good faith they should not be told that, "For the greater good, you're going to have a railway thundering past your house." I would not like that, and I am sure that no member would. And I do not think that it is fair to those people when there is a perfectly good alternative option.

The latest thing that is being said, or the implication that is being made, is that if this is going to be too much of a problem possibly there will be no rail corridor. I emphasise that this is not an option. The Caloundra West/Aroona residents do not regard that as an option. They believe that they do need a rail corridor and a rail system but, naturally, they want it to be the Corbould Park option.

I have written to all residents who I have been told by CAMCOS could possibly be adversely affected by a corridor that went near Corbould Park. So far I have received only six replies from people who have some concerns about that. They are justifiable concerns, and I will follow them up with the consultants. But at a public meeting held not long ago there were over 300 people who were very concerned about their homes being affected in that Caloundra West/Aroona corridor.

I think that what has to happen is that the consultants literally have to do their job and consult; that prior preferences should not be put in place; that people should be listened to; and that their rights should be adhered to. The Minister has agreed to extend the option to 21 March, not 31 March. At a meeting in the council chambers, which was held between representatives of CAMCOS, the Minister, his adviser, myself and representatives of this action group and the mayor, the Minister said that a decision in principle would be taken two weeks after the cut-off time, which is now 21 March, and that then detailed EISs, etc., would be done of the preferred rail corridor—only that corridor.

A flyer that was sent out only this week and letterbox dropped in homes now says that the Minister for Transport and Minister for Main Roads is expected to make an announcement on the corridor options by the end of March 1999. That is only one week after the close of submissions. It is not realistic. It makes the people in my electorate ask, "How genuine is this Minister and are these consultants if they are not even going to take two weeks to review the submissions before a decision is taken on which is the corridor option?"

I reiterate that there is no mad rush. This is not a railway that is going to be put down next week. It is going to be put down in the future. In the words of the consultants, it will be a double-line heavy rail gauge. There is concern that freight could come in on that line, although I think that is not the real intention at this time—and that should be said. Nevertheless, freight could be carried on the line in the future, particularly if the loop does eventually go out to the Nambour line. It is the consultants' considered opinion that eventually it will. They say that diesel trains will not go on the line. If they are on the main line north, certainly they can come in on that line. We are talking about in the future, when possibly those consultants will not even be around, but the people who have the railway will be.

A question was asked about a loop. Apparently this option was discarded due to the high-cost engineering constraints and impact on canelands. But, when asked at various public meetings did they think that a loop could occur in the future, the consultants certainly said that yes, they thought it could, and they thought that that would make more sense. And in many ways, it would. They talk about express services to Brisbane during weekdays, which is good; regular all-stop services for local commuters; and trains needing to run about half-hourly during peak hours and hourly during off-peak times. They talk about speeds of 100 km/h and having the tilt train on that line. All those things are good, but they are not good if they are running right next to one's home. That is why the Caloundra West/Aroona corridor is not really an option. The Corbould Park option is a very good option.

Some concern has been raised that this would draw business out of the Caloundra CBD. Those members who are familiar with Caloundra would know that, even if the Aroona option went ahead, there would have to be a park and ride near the roundabout at Nicklin Way, actually near the current Caloundra Airport. So people are going to have to get into their cars and drive anyhow. It is only four minutes more—I have timed it—to Corbould Park. Why not do that and not create this problem? People are going to have to park and ride anyhow; they are not going to be able to walk from home to the railway or from the shops to the railway. So that is not an option that can be considered.

There are environmental concerns about the Aroona option, particularly how it would affect Bells Creek if it went near the back of Pelican Waters. Those concerns have been acknowledged by the Transport Department, but I do not know what is going to be done about them. There are obvious concerns about pollution from a rail service and there are environmental concerns about the destruction of a rainforest and of a naturally green environment that we need in a growing area such as Caloundra. It is essential that these concerns are listened to; but more importantly, it is essential that they are acted upon. The Minister has agreed to come to a public meeting on 22 March. I will be there. Unfortunately, it is after the time for submissions closes. I think it would have been more realistic if it had been before. But he has agreed to come. I ask him as the Minister to make sure that he is making this decision, not CAMCOS, and that he looks at justice and equity for the constituents in my electorate and does not just listen to the economic rationalists who may be in the Transport Department but who have very few concerns about how this sort of thing can impact on the lives of very genuine working men and women and their children.

I reiterate that no corridor is not an option. We need a corridor. Corbould Park is an obvious solution. I ask the Minister to give it his serious consideration.
