



Speech by

Mr M. HORAN

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

Hansard 13 April 1999

WOODFORD CORRECTIONAL CENTRE

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (7.05 p.m.): Tonight I am calling on the State Government to seriously reconsider its decision to proceed with the construction of an extra 400-bed unit at the Woodford Correctional Centre. Tonight I am calling on the State Government to scrap plans to build the 400-bed facility and, in its place, to build two 200-bed prisons in Inglewood, Roma or Yarraman.

Good government is about spreading economic benefits and spreading job creation opportunities. Good government is about identifying struggling centres and providing the necessary economic injections. Good government is not about centralised policy or putting political desires ahead of the very real social and economic needs of our smaller communities. The Borbidge Government recognised the need to spread economic benefits and job creation opportunities throughout the State. That is why the then Cabinet, through the guidance of Russell Cooper, adopted a policy to build three 200-bed prisons in rural and regional areas. We made a conscious decision to build a number of smaller prisons to spread the benefits, instead of building one centralised facility, and we made a conscious decision to build prisons only in those areas where the community was supportive. After a massive site identification and feasibility study, the coalition short-listed four communities as potential homes to the new prisons. These were Inglewood, Maryborough, Roma and Yarraman. All that good work has since been undone.

With the election of the Beattie Labor Government, Queensland witnessed an eight-month freeze on capital works in the prison system. The Minister for Corrective Services stopped the good work done by the coalition. The Minister then claimed that he would make a decision well before Christmas 1998, then it was just before Christmas, and then he said he would make a decision by the end of January. He missed all three deadlines. When he finally made a decision, he decided to build a single 500-bed prison at Maryborough and add an extra 400-bed prison unit to the existing 600-bed Woodford correctional facility.

The State coalition congratulates Maryborough on its success. Maryborough was on the coalition's short list because we knew that it was the one centre which would be perfect for a prison facility. However, the State coalition does not congratulate and, in fact, condemns the State Government for its decision to ignore the remaining three rural centres by building a 400-bed unit at Woodford. When added to the 600-bed unit that exists there now, the Woodford facility is set to become the largest high-security prison in Australia. That in itself is a dangerous scenario, and it raises a whole host of security, rehabilitation and planning issues. It also highlights the Beattie Government's total neglect of rural Queensland.

Tonight I am calling on the Beattie Labor Government and, more particularly, the Minister for Police and Corrective Services, to go back to the drawing board and reconsider this disastrous Woodford decision. The challenge for this Government and, more particularly, for the Premier, who claimed that he wanted to be a Premier for all Queenslanders and to govern for all Queensland, is to go back and look at the site proposals put forward by those Queenslanders at Inglewood, Roma and Yarraman. The State Government must progress with prison construction in those areas, which would not only drought proof those communities but also provide hope and a future for the many young people in those areas who are increasingly moving to the cities in search of jobs. If anything will put an economic base and a platform in those country towns it is the provision of a 200-bed prison and the associated direct and indirect employment that will be provided.

In selecting two of the three sites for the construction of prisons, it is also important for the State Government to give an ironclad guarantee that the third site, or the site that misses out, will be the next site in future expansions. Prison numbers will continue to grow, and it is simply a matter of time before a further facility is required. This Government's decision to neglect rural Queensland by ignoring the submissions of three rural communities is not an allegation based on the principles of the National Party. Even the Labor Party's own secretary of the South Burnett branch hit the ABC radio waves saying that the decision to build the Woodford facility was a real snub for rural Queensland. Those were the words of the Labor Party's own branch secretary.

The failure of this Government to understand basic economics astounds all of us on this side of the House. The construction of centralised facilities will only centralise job creation and confine economic benefits to only one or two areas of Queensland. By contrast, the construction of a series of facilities across a range of struggling communities provides the perfect opportunity for the State Government to spread growth, jobs, hope and investment to many parts of the State. For the sake of the Inglewood, Roma and Yarraman communities, in the strongest possible terms I urge the State Government to reconsider its Woodford decision. It is not too late to overturn that incorrect decision and spread some Government influence and some economic opportunities to the smaller centres of Queensland.

Time expired.
