



Speech by

**Mr M. HORAN**

**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH**

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Hansard 27 May 1999

**STATE DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS ORGANISATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr HORAN** (Toowoomba South—NPA) (4.48 p.m.): In joining in this debate today on the State Development and Public Works Organisation Amendment Bill I particularly want to speak about a number of developments in the Toowoomba and Darling Downs area. In my opening remarks I want to comment on the main issue of this Bill which concerns the acquisition of land by the Government for third-party purposes.

I think all of us, as members of Parliament, have gone through some pretty difficult times when there has been a powerline or a highway going through our electorates. We all know how we have to endeavour to ensure that it goes through in the best way possible. There are a lot of people who find themselves seriously dislocated. People lose the social amenity of their houses or their properties. The concern about this legislation is the way that it relates to social infrastructure.

For example, the Bill refers to schools and hospitals. Generally speaking, private organisations wanting to build social infrastructure such as schools and hospitals have always bought their own land. That has always been the case in this State. If there was any special case, introducing specific legislation, which is the way that we have handled such matters previously, would be the way to go about it. However, this legislation gives a blanket power, right across-the-board, for the Government to be able to act on behalf of third parties who want to acquire land.

In previous speeches today, we have heard a fair bit about SUDAW. The companies involved in the SUDAW consortium have spent in the order of \$20m through the investigative and assessment process. There is no way in the world that they would have done that if they did not have the confidence that the Government of the day would provide the specific legislation that would be required to enable that project to go ahead. The same situation would occur with any other project of substantial dimension.

I indicated that I wanted to talk about five issues regarding Toowoomba and the downs. I am particularly pleased to be able to talk about those issues in the debate because the Minister is present. Recently, during the country Cabinet meeting in Toowoomba, I was involved in two deputations on two of these issues. One deputation related to the redevelopment of the inner city, which involves the sale by the Commonwealth Government of the old historic post office, which is one of the beautiful buildings of Queensland. It is situated next door to the old courthouse, which is owned by the State Government, and which will be for sale, as will the old police station, which is behind those buildings and just around the corner, and the associated land in between.

It is probably a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the City of Toowoomba to have a major inner-city development that retains the magnificence of those old stone buildings, the post office and the courthouse, and at the same time places in the inner city something that will make the heart of the city beat—a mixture of inner-city living and inner-city hotels for inner-city conventions and conferences, and inner-city retail. The development will match the \$12m Empire Theatre, which is virtually next door in Neil Street, which has made it a very popular precinct. It will be located on Margaret Street, which is becoming one of the most beautiful boulevards of the world, with the tree-lined eastern part of Margaret Street leading into the recently redeveloped part of Margaret Street, which is now called Eat Street, and the other part of Margaret Street to the west, which is being developed by the council now, and which will be called Style Street. It will mean that there will be inner-city living and inner-city conferences. It will

bring people to the city, to stay, to meet, to go to the theatre next door and to experience the various attractions of Toowoomba and the Darling Downs.

Importantly, this development will do a number of other things. It will provide a large number of jobs for young people, particularly those involved in the hospitality and catering industry. It will provide immediate funding for construction costs. I believe that it will really make the inner city of Toowoomba a very vibrant, very attractive city. It will attract more people from the populated parts of south-east Queensland to stay at Toowoomba for various reasons.

As I mentioned, there have been a number of difficulties involved with these three separate buildings. This process has been going on for some time—under the coalition Government, through the Premier's Department, and under the Labor Government, through the Department of State Development. We have also had meetings with the Police Minister and with the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing. I say to the Minister for State Development that there is a great deal of recognition of his efforts to make this development come to fruition. It has brought together the issue of the Commonwealth Government wanting to sell the post office—and to do so fairly urgently—the State Government having the old courthouse for sale and then, finally, the issue of the police station, which is the difficult one.

There is some vacant land in Hume Street behind the old police station, which is earmarked for the redevelopment of a new police station and watch-house. The police believe that that piece of land is not adequate to provide them with what they need for storage buildings, for their communications buildings, for their parking and for their regional headquarters. In a city the size of Toowoomba, an adequate central police station and associated facilities are essential and important. As this proposed developed is located in the midst of my electorate, I am a little torn between wanting to see it go ahead and at the same time wanting to make sure that the police get exactly what they need.

The Minister's department came up with the proposal of purchasing an adjoining block of land owned by the Uniting Church. That appears to be a very positive step towards solving this issue and making both sides happy. However, from a social or personal point of view, I want to be sure that the old people who live in the 24 retirement units that are operated by the Uniting Church on that land are looked after. A lot of them like living there because the building is located right in town. Often times a retirement complex is located outside of a city or in the suburbs. This building is located right in the city. Many of these residents like the convenience of walking straight into the middle of town. So if anything happens in this regard, it is important that the Uniting Church in particular makes sure that these people are really well looked after, because many of them are in their eighties. However, if a police station is constructed and the retirement complex remains—it is about three levels high—it would be looking directly into the wall of the new multistorey police station. So it would not then be a very pleasant place in which to live, anyway.

So that development is a very important project. I would like to record the appreciation for what is being done, because it is pulling together a lot of various departments in trying to make something happen, which will be very good in terms of jobs, particularly for young people, and the tourism and convention industries. I think that it is important for Queensland that we get some developments out of the south-east corner and into some of the regional cities such as Toowoomba, which is a south-western regional city.

One of the other projects that is important and involves the Department of State Development to varying degrees is the second range crossing. That project involves Federal Government funding. The Federal Government has earmarked \$24m for that project up to 2002. The corridor has been finalised and it has started a series of acquisitions to occur year after year. The big concern in Toowoomba and on the downs is that the Commonwealth money runs out after the year 2002 and there is no more funding earmarked until the year 2007. So it is that gap between the two lots of funding that concerns us. The Federal Government has talked about commencing the construction of the second range crossing in the year 2010. That is probably five years too late. The crossing needs to be well and truly under construction by the year 2005 at least.

That road will contribute to these other things that I am going to talk about that will make Toowoomba and the eastern downs one of the export and transport hubs of Australia. Currently, the number of vehicles coming up the highway to Toowoomba is increasing at an enormous rate. They go straight through James Street—the main east-west road of Toowoomba. That is the main route for the trucks that travel to Brisbane, to Melbourne and to Mount Isa. By the year 2004 there will be 26,000 vehicles coming up that range per day, which will mean that the range road will be clogged. Bearing in mind that a large percentage of those trucks will be B doubles, semitrailers or body trucks, that traffic will clog up the range highway and the city. So this second range crossing, where the trucks will be able to cross the range while travelling at somewhere between 80 kilometres an hour and 90 kilometres an hour and get on to the highway that leads down to Melbourne or out to the Warrego Highway to Darwin, will be a huge boost.

Over the past years, in association with that project, some studies have been conducted by the Eastern Downs Regional Organisation of Councils—EDROC—into the need for a road transport warehousing industrial estate hub located to the west of Toowoomba, the eastern Darling Downs. I would like to compliment the project officers from the Department of Transport and the project officer working on behalf of EDROC for their work. Those officers identified four sites, and basically the decision as to where to locate this estate has come down to two sites. One site is the province of EDROC and the Department of Transport, which want to develop a site at Charlton, just west of Toowoomba. Adjacent to the proposed new highway there will be a warehousing and transport terminal. The other site is owned by the Wagner group of companies. That is a family-owned company based in Toowoomba that operates between the New South Wales/Victorian border and to the north-west of Queensland. It is a very substantial and solid company involved in quarrying, concrete and industrial estates. That family group of companies owns Wellcamp Downs of 3,000 acres, which is just west of Toowoomba on the Cecil Plains road. It will be adjacent to this new range crossing road that links up with the Gore Highway and adjacent to the proposed Australian inland highway, which I am going to speak about shortly. I am grateful to the Minister for meeting with a deputation from one of the groups and allowing it to present its case.

Everybody wants to see one of these projects go ahead. It is important that the industrial estate goes ahead, and that it is viable and successful. The EDROC proposal seems to be limited to transport and warehousing and will involve some cost for Government, be it local government or State Government. The private enterprise proposal will mean that \$20m will be funded by a family group of companies that has had a very successful track record. I do not know whether the Minister had a chance to see the concrete batching plant that that company built on the corner of Alderley Street and Anzac Avenue, Toowoomba. I doubt that there would be a better facility for size, effectiveness and practicality in Australia. If one could say that a concrete batching plant could be attractive, that plant is. It provides a good example of the quality and professionalism of the company. The Jondaryan Shire Council will make the decision on whether to grant town planning approval. The concern is that two proposals will divide the opportunities and makes it difficult for success. However, it is important that an industrial estate goes ahead as part of the new road system. It will be a great contributor to export and transport.

The other proposal is the Australian inland railway that has been proposed by the ATEC group. About 50 to 60 shires, a number of private organisations and companies and individuals throughout eastern Australia are interested in supporting the project. Mr Everal Compton, who leads the proposal, has suggested that the first stage of the railway be built between Moree and Fisherman Islands. That would tap into the northern part of New South Wales and allow for the transport of the cotton, bulk grains and other produce of that large broadacre irrigation and dryland farming area. Ultimately, this is a very exciting prospect for Australia. If we are talking about State development, this is a big project that could really open up ports such as Fisherman Islands, Gladstone, Townsville or Darwin to the produce of western New South Wales, Victoria and the south-western and central parts of Queensland.

The other major development that fits into this cog of exciting proposals is the proposal to recycle the water of Brisbane, Ipswich and other councils in the area and send it, via a pipeline system, to the Lockyer Valley and the Darling Downs to provide security of irrigation water supply. In turn, that security will lead to a massive increase in production—somewhere in the order of \$130m on the Darling Downs alone—which will lead to export orders. People will know that they can sell on the futures market, enter into contracts, maintain quality and standards and have reliability of supply.

Much has been spoken in the Parliament about this particular proposal and it is important that it becomes a reality. There is a window of opportunity with the Brisbane City Council and the Ipswich City Council having to upgrade their sewerage plants at a cost of hundreds of millions of dollars. There is an environmental benefit, in that the water will not be pumped into Moreton Bay. It would be one of the greatest engineering and technological projects that Queensland would ever be involved in. We lift Toowoomba's water 400 metres vertically from the Cressbrook Dam to the top of the Toowoomba range with a series of pumping stations. The range is about 600 metres high, so technically it is relatively easy to do. The Darling Downs is crisscrossed with a system of hundreds of ring tanks that are located on individual properties, channels, laser levelling and so on.

In conclusion, these five projects provide an exciting opportunity for Toowoomba and the Darling Downs. In decades gone by we have seen the enormous excitement generated by the development of the coalmines of central Queensland. We have seen the development of Gladstone, which has changed from a little town based on a meatworks to one of the great industrial cities of the world. We have seen places like Mackay benefit from the development of bulk terminals and hinterland coalmines. We have seen tourism develop in Cairns, enhanced following the building of the international airport. Here is a chance for Toowoomba and the Darling Downs to develop their own unique system.

The beauty of many of these projects is that only one or two will require cash from the State Government. The inner city proposal only needs coordination, organisation and assistance so that private enterprise can bid for the properties and build the facilities in the centre of the city that will mean so much to its residents.

The second range crossing is to be funded by the Federal Government. It requires us as local members and the Queensland Government, through the Department of Transport and the Department of State Development, to place continued pressure on the Federal Government because that range crossing is so important. The rail line proposal may involve some Government support. However, to a substantial extent it is to be funded by communities, businesses and organisations along the line because it is seen as a very viable proposal. If the industrial estate proposal of the private enterprise group goes ahead, it would cost the Government nothing. That company is prepared to pay \$20m of its own money to build a world-class industrial estate. The project simply needs the facilitation and assistance of the Department of State Development. The proposal that would involve some funding from the State Government would be the recycled water proposal. Of course, there is also a need for the Federal Government to provide funds and for those utilising the water to make a contribution to maintenance, water costs, operational costs and so on.

Altogether, these are very exciting proposals. It is not often in one lifetime that five major projects come together, and they could be starting to come to fruition in five years' time. The great benefit to this vastly populated part of south-east Queensland is that we have a seaport at Fisherman Islands and to the west, some one and a half to two hours by road, we have a vast area with irrigation potential and some of the best farms in the world. That area now has the potential to become the eastern Australian transport and export hub.

At the end of the day, State development is about development. It is about creating jobs and sustaining growth, particularly in those parts of the State that need sustainable growth. It is not often that an exciting opportunity like this comes along. We often cite the example of the Snowy Mountains scheme, but because these five projects need to be pulled together, they present just as great a challenge. I commend the proposals to the Government. This is an opportunity that the Department of State Development can get right behind. All local members in Toowoomba will certainly do our share of lobbying to make sure that these projects come to fruition. In particular, we will work with and push the Federal Government to do its share. I commend the projects to the Department of State Development and the Minister as some of the most exciting opportunities that have ever come to Queensland. The projects present a chance for us to be involved in big development projects that are located away from the coast. It is a chance not to be missed.

Time expired.

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