



Speech by

Mr M. HORAN

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

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ELECTORAL AMENDMENT BILL

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (9.59 p.m.): I take pleasure in joining in the debate on the Electoral Amendment Bill. I support the motion which has been moved by the member for Warwick.

I want to refer to some electorate matters which I think are very important and which need to be raised in this debate. All members realise that in recent years there has been a certain amount of cynicism in electorates throughout the country. People have become cynical because of what has been forced upon them in relation to the size of electorates and also in relation to the duties of members of Parliament.

I am fortunate that I have an inner-city electorate, as has my colleague from Toowoomba North. My electorate is probably the same size as that of the member for Yeronga. I can virtually get anywhere in my electorate in 10 to 15 minutes. I often compare my situation with that of my colleagues who have to drive five or six hours to get somewhere in their electorates. It takes some members five or six hours to get home from Parliament. For myself and other colleagues it takes only an hour and three-quarters or so.

The United Nations made two points about the fairness of electorates. One was one man, one vote and the other was people's access to their representative. We in Queensland have to remember that our State is not like Tasmania, Belgium, Holland or England; Queensland is the biggest decentralised State in the world, bar none. I think that it is becoming increasingly unfair for the people of Queensland that their members are representing bigger and bigger electorates. I compare the size of an inner-city electorate such as Toowoomba South, where I can reach anything that is located within my electorate in 10 minutes or 15 minutes, with the size of the electorate of Callide, which is not supposedly a big electorate. On a Saturday, my colleague the member for Toowoomba North and I can attend four or five functions within our small electorates—a couple in the morning, a couple in the afternoon and one at night. The member for Callide might be asked to attend something at Biggenden, something at Baralaba, something at Wandoan, something at Theodore, something at Moura, something at Biloela and something at Mundubbera. How does that member attend all of those functions?

People are starting to feel disfranchised, because they cannot see their member personally as a result of the electorates having become too large. The academics, the scribes and the journalists say, "All you need is more resources." The people in the electorates do not want to see a resource, a fax, a message, or a staff member; they would like to have a cup of tea with the member after the speech night, the meeting or whatever the function is. Those members who are fortunate enough to represent inner-city electorates can do that.

Earlier this year, I had the wonderful opportunity to travel with the member for Gregory through about one sixth of his electorate. It took us five days—five days of hard work, of driving like mad so many hundred kilometres a day—to visit places such as Windorah, Jundah and Birdsville. That member has a strong commitment to his area and the people of those towns like to see him a couple of times a year. I ask members to consider the task of servicing those large electorates, the increase in parliamentary duties over the past decade or so, and the matters that we in this Parliament attend to. I ask members to also consider the number of weeks that we waste around about October when the Estimates hearings are on and Parliament does not sit. In this three-week sitting, we are trying to force stuff through this Parliament like it is a sausage-making machine. I ask members to consider also the

number of committee meetings that members have to attend. I think that members of Parliament and the parliamentary system are starting to lose touch with what we really do, and that is represent people and, as members of Parliament, make decisions after moving around our electorates meeting and talking to people.

Tonight, we are debating amendments to the Electoral Act. I think that it is about time that we started to realise that people in Australia feel isolated. When the member for Crows Nest was the member for Roma, there were about 8,000 people—

Mr Cooper: 8,500.

Mr HORAN: There were 8,500 people in his electorate. The boundary of that electorate ranged from Roma up to Rolleston—probably four or five hours' drive—but by working like mad and driving like mad, it was manageable. However, the member for Callide has to look after 14 towns such as Biggenden, Gayndah, Mundubbera, Eidsvold, Monto, Biloela—

Mr Reeves: What you are proposing?

Mr HORAN: Does the member not think that that is unfair? He represents a small electorate. He can run around his patch in 10 minutes. I am telling the member how unfair it is for those members who represent large areas. I have no doubt whatsoever that, because of the size of the electorates that some members represent, it is becoming gradually more unfair for the people in those electorates. Every nine years, we have a redistribution. Those who represent electorates outside the larger cities find that their electorates get bigger and bigger—more and more towns to visit and more hours of travel. Members of Parliament are leaving functions at 11 o'clock at night and driving for five hours, camping in a table drain at the side of the road in order to get home to see their wives at 6 o'clock in the morning. It is getting to the stage at which it is absolutely ridiculous.

At the same time, as members of Parliament, we are being urged to have more and more committees for this, that and the other and to spend more and more time sitting around at Estimates hearings. Yet we have important legislation before the House— something like 40 Bills before the House. Parliament has become like the KR Darling Downs sausage-making machine: trying to push stuff through. Parliamentarians sit in this place until at 2 o'clock in the morning and then all day the next day trying to pay due attention to what they are debating.

Tonight presents an opportunity to put forward some thoughts that I have had for a long, long time about what I think is happening and what I think amounts to a degradation of the quality of the representation that is able to be provided to people by those of us who represent the larger electorates.

Mr Reeves: What is the alternative?

Mr HORAN: The alternative is to reduce the size of these electorates so that members can give people personal representation instead of making the electorates bigger and bigger and bigger.

Mr Reeves: Bring back the gerrymander.

Mr HORAN: The member talks about a gerrymander. The coalition has always won an election with more than 50% of the two-party preferred vote. Back in 1995, the Labor Party got back into Government with less than 50% of the vote.

There has to be a bit of honesty and sense brought back into the system, and one way is through reducing the size of electorates. To be a true Queensland Parliament, we should have true Queensland representation, because we are the most decentralised State in the world. We have to remember that this Parliament is a place in which backbenchers and other members can stand up and speak for five minutes or 10 minutes. We have to move away from having to come to Brisbane to attend various committees of this and various committees of that. It never stops. Being a member of Parliament is about being in the electorate, or being a good Minister and looking after the whole State plus one's own electorate and spending some decent, quality time in this Parliament. This amendment certainly gives me a chance to voice those concerns.

Government members interjected.

Mr HORAN: The gaggle up the back can carry on, but I tell members that the message is there. We saw it at the referendum. We saw it at the last State election. People know when they are being left alone. It is about time we brought a bit of reform into the system so that we can give some quality time to people, so that we can give some quality time to this Parliament and we stopped being manoeuvred and pushed around by various media people who want to tell us what we should be doing. We should be saying what is best for the people and how best to pass quality legislation through this Parliament.

Mr Reynolds: You mean what's best for the National Party—what's best for rigging the electorate.

Mr HORAN: All that member wants to do is have his little patch in the eastern suburbs of Townsville on the waterfront. I would like to put him out there in Robbie Mitchell's seat and let him go to

a function at Julia Creek and then jump in his vehicle at 11 o'clock at night and drive home to Charters Towers. He would end up wrapped around a gum tree on the side of the road. I am pleased to hear some of these interjections from members opposite, because they are obviously not interested in people having good and fair representation in Parliament and members having a bit of quality time in this place where they can work—and work well—between 9 o'clock in the morning and 7 o'clock at night instead of all of this business of sitting until 2 o'clock in the morning and pushing through legislation. I remind members of the old adage of, "Keep them up late enough two nights in a row, then you can run them up the crush on Friday and they will go through meekly and up the loading ramp."

I support the amendment moved by the member for Warwick—

Mr Healy: He needs to go up the crush once or twice.

Mr HORAN: Yes. It would have to be a pretty wide crush. Being a member interested in the arts, I imagine that we would get some lovely music out of him if we hit him with the electric jigger as we put him on the truck. It would be a good squeal. It would be like the noise that we hear from the pigs as they go off to KR Darling Downs. I did not mean the reference to pigs to be in any way demeaning to the Minister.

I have been pleased to put this issue before the House.

Mr Reeves: I saved you 45 minutes last Friday. What are you talking about?

Mr HORAN: Driving with the member took 45 minutes off my life.

I am pleased to be able to put this issue before the House. I hope that what I have said tonight acts as some sort of catalyst to get some decent, quality representation for the people and some quality time in this House where we can actually work on Bills and people can speak about issues that affect their electorate without having this sausage-making process at the end of the year.
