



Speech by

**PAUL LUCAS MLA**

**MEMBER FOR LYTTON**

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Hansard 28 April 1999

**POLISH IMMIGRANTS; BLACKWATER CREEK FLOODWAY**

**Mr LUCAS** (Lytton—ALP) (11.14 p.m.): On Friday, 9 April I was honoured and privileged to represent the Minister for Transport and Main Roads, the Honourable Steve Bredhauer, at a commemorative ceremony at the Blackwater Creek floodway near Adavale to recognise the contribution of Polish immigrants to the construction of that floodway from 1949 to 1951.

**Mr Baumann** interjected.

**Mr LUCAS:** The member raises an interesting point. My great-grandmother was the first woman of European extraction in Adavale and my father was born in Charleville, so my family has some historical relationship with the area.

It was a great honour and pleasure to be at this ceremony for two reasons. The ceremony commemorated not only the contribution of these postwar Polish migrants but also the great warmth, friendliness and support that they were given by the people of Adavale and Quilpie at the time.

These 12 Polish migrants came to this country at the end of the Second World War. Poland suffered first with the Nazis going through the country and then with the communists. I imagine that Poland was not a very nice place to experience at that time in modern history. These people had had a terrible time in their own country and were looking for a new life, and they chose Australia. Initially these immigrants were sent to Sydney and then from Brisbane to Quilpie. They lived in tents for about a year outside Adavale while they were working on this floodway at Blackwater Creek. One can imagine how hot it would have been there and they would have had very little in the way of modern equipment. They worked and worked. Just as important is the support that they received from the local community.

Migrants have played a great part in developing our country. It is instructive to look at some statistics. Between 1947 and 1961, 73% of the increase in our labour force was as a result of migrant workers. In the last 50 years, our increase in population as a result of migration has been 5.7 million. This is the contribution that these people have made to this country. Without their contribution the country would be fundamentally different and fundamentally worse off. We owe a great debt to these migrants. These people also recognise the debt that they owe to the Australian society of the time for welcoming them. I seek leave to have the names of these 12 Polish migrants incorporated in Hansard.

Leave granted.

Andy Demowicz; Jo Baginski; Tonie Biaty; Richard Bogdanski; Stan Bralinski; Ted Dunin; Carl Gros; Jan Jarzembski; John Maciejewski; Ted Mularczyk; Stan Slszypa; Happy Sleg

**Mr LUCAS:** Of course, many years have passed since 1949, when this floodway was constructed. These men have gone on to be proud Polish Australians with families. Not only have their fathers contributed; the families themselves are now contributing and are upstanding members of society.

Unfortunately, only five of these Polish workers are still alive—Andy Demowicz, Tonie Biaty, Jan Jarzembski, Jo Baginski and Carl Gros. Andy spoke at the ceremony and told of the warm welcome that they received after the war and how they were taught language in the local community at Adavale. Incidentally, all three of the Polish Australians at the ceremony had married women of Australian birth. Not only did they find work; they found love and happiness in the local community.

Tonie Biaty gave a particularly touching speech at the ceremony. He mentioned that prior coming to Australia immediately after the war he was working in a salt mine 12 hours a day. He was not given the freedom to practice his religion; he was not in a country of peace. He loved Australia for the opportunities that it gave him to enjoy basic fundamental freedoms and to be given a fair go. These are the model Australians that comprise 99.99% of migrants to this country. This is why we owe them a debt of gratitude.

I thank the previous member for Transport and Main Roads, Vaughan Johnson, and the present Minister, Steve Bredhauer, for being keen proponents of this commemorative ceremony. It was suggested some time ago by Andy Demowicz, who, incidentally, is a constituent of mine, and Governments of both political persuasions took the idea up with great gusto. I also thank the Roma office of the Main Roads Department, in particular Doug Head. Most of all, I thank the people of Adavale and Quilpie and those Polish Australians who came out to this country 50 years ago, who have worked together and shown what we can do. There is much more in this country that unites us than divides us.

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