



Speech by

SHAUN NELSON

MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

Hansard 8 June 1999

STATE DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS ORGANISATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr NELSON (Tablelands—IND) (10.03 p.m.): It took the Australian Labor Party less than 24 hours to prove me right. On Sorry Day I called them hypocrites and I call them hypocrites again. Even though they have put a little in the legislation to appease native title holders, the reality is that when the Government builds the gas pipeline from Papua New Guinea it will reclaim native title land. It is as simple as that and the Government knows it. I know what the Government was saying sorry for on Sorry Day, and it was not for the stolen generation. In reality, the Government said sorry because it knows that eventually it will have to reclaim native title land and it will use this Bill to do so. That is the truth and the Government cannot deny it.

One of my main aims in life is to one day own a block, build a house, plant a veggie patch and so on. I hope that I can be buried on that freehold land. However, having a freehold title to a piece of land is no guarantee that I can keep the land for as long as I am alive and hand it on to my family for generations afterwards. If that is so, what guarantees do we have in society? The Bill does not scare me because it will be a brave person who claims freehold land on the tableland and they will climb over my dead body to do so. The Government can forget the Bill, because it will not work on the Atherton Tableland. As soon as people realise what the Government is doing, it will not work.

I understand the need for State development and the need to spend money. The Deputy Premier can shake his head all he likes, because I know that he could not give a rats about simple people or anyone else but himself. I seriously believe that the rights of land-holders need to be paramount in dealing with all forms of State development. I do not think that anyone opposes the building of dams or the building of infrastructure that will guarantee that people will be able to work their land into the future. I know that we need a dam on the Atherton Tableland to replace Tinaroo, and one of those dam proposals is the Nulinga project.

Mr Knuth interjected.

Mr NELSON: It certainly will not. I know that we need that sort of infrastructure development, but in the taking of—

Mr Schwarten: There is nothing worse than a One Nation rat.

Mr NELSON: I cannot hear a word.

Mr Elder: I think he said that there is nothing worse than a One Nation rat.

Mr NELSON: He can say that all he likes.

Mr Schwarten: You cannot get much lower than that.

Mr NELSON: The simple fact that members opposite do not like me means that I am a good person. I thank the Minister for his compliment.

We need infrastructure development and I do not think that anyone in this House knows that better than a north Queenslander. Infrastructure development is very important to the future of people on the tableland, especially when it involves roads and dams. However, I would not like to see it go ahead to the detriment of small landowners, small farmers and small businessmen. I certainly do not like any sort of legislation that works towards helping big business or giving big business a leg up. That

is simply what the National Competition Policy is. We call it a National Competition Policy, but in reality—

Mr Knuth: Today's Labor.

Mr NELSON: Yes, today's Labor. We work towards handing out bigger and better deals, and the National Competition Policy is a perfect example of this. It is called a national competition policy but in reality all it does is stop small business from competing against large business and gives large business a leg up so that they can do better deals to get the jobs. It is as simple as that. Therefore, I certainly oppose any legislation that does not work for the individual. Even though we live in a society that is made up of groups, groups are made up of individuals. We are talking about taking away the ultimate in land ownership, which is the right of somebody to be safe on their freehold land.

This all comes back to the recent movie *The Castle*, which talked about "on just terms". Things are different if a proposal is for the good of the State. If I owned a block of land and somebody came to me and said, "Sean, for the good of the State we will pay you \$X for your land so that we can build an infrastructure project on it." Let us say that I owned land on the Nulinga dam site and I was going to be given a fair package for it. As a right-minded citizen I would say, "Fair enough." If it was for the good of the State, I dare say that I would go along with it on just terms. However, when the Government comes along and says, "Look Sean, under this Bill we're nicking your land whether you like it or not", it will have to expect a fight. In reality, all that the Government is doing is opening itself up to massive amounts of public anger, and justifiable anger, if it is going to tell people, "I am sorry, but your land is gone whether you like it or not", and it gives people no recourse.

It harks back to a simple statement that I have already quoted, and again I humbly correct the Minister for Public Works and Housing: John F. Kennedy said that when you make peaceful protest impossible, you make violent protest inevitable. A large proportion of the community has simply had enough of being stepped on.

Mr Schwarten interjected.

Mr NELSON: John F. Kennedy said that. The Minister can look it up.

Mr Schwarten: He may have said that, but you are not him.

Mr NELSON: I do not try to pretend to be him. I certainly do not want to get shot.

Mr Schwarten: You have a bigger ego than him.

Mr NELSON: "Ego" is not a dirty word.

Mr Schwarten: That's original, isn't it?

Mr NELSON: I was not even born when they said that.

Mr Palaszczuk: Give us a bit of Chaucer, come on.

Mr NELSON: No, I stick to the greats. We often speak about why members in this House are held in disrepute outside of it.

An honourable member: Look at the member for Rockhampton.

Mr NELSON: His interview with Mike Munro the other day was a glorious performance and was up there with Pauline Hanson. He had the media presence of Pauline Hanson.

Mr Schwarten: It's a wonder you are not a follower.

Mr NELSON: I am certainly not.

Mr Schwarten: At least I never called myself "honourable".

Mr NELSON: I never called myself "honourable", the newspaper did. Perhaps we should speak about the member for Kurwongbah and a few other members who have made simple errors. I did not make the error and it was rectified.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr Clark): Order! The member will return to the Bill.

Mr NELSON: If the interjections would cease, I would not mind doing that. As I said, I intended to speak for only a couple of minutes, but I can go on. I can talk under water, or for as long as the Minister wants me to. I have 13 minutes to go.

One of the main reasons that members of the House are held in disrepute outside is the attitudes displayed in this Bill. Riding roughshod over individual's rights would have to be paramount amongst the reasons that people tell me they do not like politicians. I do not think it has anything to do with our behaviour in the House. I think it is a good thing that we have a go at each other in this House, because by doing so we are exercising the rigorous nature of the House instead of biffing each other out on the streets. It is a better alternative to have vigorous debate in this House. It is very healthy. There are certainly many people with whom I disagree and with whom I could have a very good argument.

An honourable member: What about Jim Fouras?

Mr NELSON: I have the utmost respect for the member for Ashgrove. It was good to have a vigorous debate in front of a television camera. That was worth while. It is worth while hearing all views to the contrary.

However, the main reason we are seeing a backlash in the community against members of the House is the attitudes displayed in this Bill, which provides blatantly that land will be reclaimed. This Bill will enact powers that will give people the right to take land. I spoke with Aboriginal people in the community after National Sorry Day. I said, "There you go. There's a simple point. In less than 24 hours the Beattie Government turned around and slapped you in the face." I said to them, "They weren't saying sorry for the stolen generation, they were saying sorry because they were about to slug you." That is especially so with respect to the Chevron gas pipeline. I sincerely doubt the merits of building a gas pipeline stretching from a country such as Papua New Guinea. I challenge anybody here who has been to Papua New Guinea to disagree with me. It is not exactly what I would call one of the most stable environments in which to build a major development. However, when that gas pipeline is built it will inevitably cross Aboriginal land at some point. It will be interesting to see what sorts of legal battles, wrangling and apologies we see from the Australian Labor Party at that time. I think it was quite hypocritical to bring in this Bill so close to National Sorry Day, when the Labor Party beat its chest about how much it loves the Aboriginal people on the one hand and, on the other hand, similar to the way in which the American Government treated the American Indians, took away their land. That was quite interesting to watch. Again, history will be the judge of how that one goes down.

The Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy was in my electorate speaking with an Aboriginal who is trying to run a company to enable Aboriginal people to obtain grader and bulldozer licences. He is trying to do something positive, trying to work in the community to get something done. When he asked for the Minister's help in obtaining a bus to get Aboriginal people out onto the job site to get work done, move forward in their communities and have a project that is working well, what did he get? The Beattie Government said, "Sorry." As he said to me, "I do not need to hear, 'Sorry.' I need a bus."

Ms Spence: Everyone needs a bus.

Mr NELSON: This is a project that is working. This is a project where something is being done—something more than mere apologies. What can he get from the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy? An apology! It was not much comfort to him.

Mr Schwarten: The people from Woorabinda got a bus from the Minister.

Mr NELSON: These people did not. They are looking after an area that stretches from my electorate right up into Cook.

Mr Schwarten: They need a better representative.

Mr NELSON: They have a fine representative and they are happy with their current one. The point of the matter is that this Bill exposes the hypocrisy of the Australian—

Ms Spence interjected.

Mr NELSON: I do not know that the Minister is telling the truth.

Ms Spence: If you were a good member you would make representations on their behalf.

Mr NELSON: I certainly would, but then I would have to talk to Ellen McIntyre—and I am not doing that. We all know her opinions on the subject. If the Minister has not had any representations, I am sure that she will get them over the next couple of days. Politics aside—

Ms Spence interjected.

Mr NELSON: Definitely from me.

Ms Spence: From you as their member?

Mr NELSON: I would send the Minister a letter if she would answer it. That would be wonderful. Again, my chances of getting an answer are very slim. As I said, if that is the case, if that would get a favourable response, regardless of politics—again, we are talking about a community project; people who are trying hard to get something done—

Ms Spence: You have done nothing on their behalf to date, have you?

Mr NELSON: I beg the Minister's pardon?

Ms Spence: You have not approached me about this issue.

Mr NELSON: Not as yet. But as I said, every time I have approached a Minister so far—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order!

Mr NELSON: What about the other Minister? I talked to him about getting a project. What did I get? Nothing but a rejection, and then he backflipped——

Mr Schwarten interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Tablelands will return to the content of the Bill.

Mr NELSON: Again, if you would control the Ministers, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would have no problem speaking to the Bill. Fair go! The Minister for Public Works can go on as much as he likes, yet you pull me up.

Mr Sullivan interjected.

Mr NELSON: Yes, that is a reflection on the Chair.

As I said, the reality is that this Bill exposes the hypocrisy behind the Australian Labor Party's apology on National Sorry Day. It shows that the reality is that, yes, native title land will not be protected from this Bill even though special clauses have been put in the Bill to pay lip-service to the Indigenous Working Group. I have sincere and deep regard for the fact that this Bill will attack the rights of freehold landowners, similar to the way in which many other pieces of legislation passed through this House have attacked the rights of freehold landowners. The simple fact is that, again, the Bill does not scare me. All I do is go around my electorate telling people what the Australian Labor Party is doing. All they have to do is read the Explanatory Notes to the Bill; they do not have to get it from me. The simple fact is that all they are doing is digging their own grave in rural Queensland.
