



Speech by

**Mr T. MALONE**

**MEMBER FOR MIRANI**

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Hansard 3 March 1999

#### ADDRESS IN REPLY

**Mr MALONE** (Mirani—NPA) (11.58 a.m.): In speaking to the motion for the adoption of the Address in Reply to His Excellency the Governor's Speech delivered on the opening of the 49th Parliament, I pledge my loyalty and that of my constituents to Her Majesty the Queen and to her representative, His Excellency the Governor. I believe His Excellency the Governor, Peter Arnison, is doing an excellent job in getting out amongst the people and promoting Queensland in a very positive light. Through you, Mr Deputy Speaker, I would also like to offer the Speaker my personal congratulations on his appointment to this most important position and the honoured office of Speaker of the Parliament.

I would also like to record in this speech my appreciation to the people of the Mirani electorate for their confidence in electing me to be their representative in the Queensland Parliament. I will strive to the best of my ability to represent all of my constituents in this Parliament and in the electorate in general for the betterment of all of my constituents.

No election is easy and the 13 June State election was my third election in four years, having been first elected to this Parliament in the 1994 by-election for Mirani. During my time in Parliament I have had a very loyal and hardworking group of people behind me who have put in a dedicated effort to present me at the election in the best light. I thank especially my wife and family for their support.

I also thank my electorate secretary for her support. As my colleague the member for Charters Towers mentioned earlier, we rely on our staff tremendously. They certainly do work above and beyond what is required for the money they are paid by this Parliament. Quite often they work in their social time, answering questions and so on from constituents. That also applies to our wives. I do not think a lot of people recognise the work that people other than the elected representative do in representing the electorate.

In addressing the Governor's Speech, which set out what Labor will do over the next three years, I will highlight what was achieved by the coalition in the two and a half years it was in Government. It is hard for me to envisage that the electorate of Mirani will get the same sort of support it had over the two and a half years of coalition Government, but I hope that it will. The ball is now in the Labor Government's court.

Mirani is an extremely diverse electorate. It consists of rainforest, coastal towns, urban areas, grazing properties and, of course, of late, inland mining centres and all that goes with that. It is also home to the largest coal export facilities in the world. That has been growing over a period of time. Mirani has almost a third of the sugar growing, milling and now refining potential in Queensland. It also has coalmining, cattle grazing, fruit and vegetable production, industry and commerce.

The catalyst for probably all of these industries is water. My colleague who spoke before me mentioned the need for water in western Queensland. I assure him that, even though the coastal regions get excessive water from time to time, the conservation of water is one of the most important things for the development and progression of industry and farming in the coastal region.

The proposed development of further water storages in the Mackay district caused some debate during the last election. A community-based reference group was put in place to investigate the local social, economic and cultural heritage issues involved in raising the walls of Kinchant Dam or

building a dam on the Finch Hatton and St Helens creek sites. There are quite a number of points that need to be clearly set out. Certainly they were raised during the election campaign.

It was firstly identified that none of these projects were No. 1 category but were listed for further investigation under the water infrastructure projects. It was indicated in very exaggerated circumstances by election propaganda that the proposed Finch Hatton Creek dam would impose on the Finch Hatton Gorge National Park. That was never the case. Even at its very highest, flood water would never come anywhere near the Finch Hatton Gorge National Park. Unfortunately, that fact was misrepresented right throughout the election campaign. Also, access to the park would not be cut off. Under any program of dam building in that area, an alternative access to the park would be provided. Certainly while I have any say in the matter, there would be an all-weather, sealed access to the gorge. It was also highlighted that there would be rainforest areas covered by water. Certainly some areas that have vegetation on them currently would be covered by water, but most of that vegetation is regrowth, in areas where cattle had grazed or cane farming had taken place.

Eventually there will be a problem in the Mackay district in that there are only two sites in the Pioneer Valley that are able to be developed as a dam. One is Finch Hatton Creek and the other is Blacks Creek. Blacks Creek has been identified as a very high cost dam and certainly something that would not be built except under very extreme circumstances.

It has been identified that by the year 2045 the Mackay City Council area will require an extra 30,000 megalitres of water. That is equivalent to an average sized dam. Sooner or later, either huge conservation measures will have to be put in place to enable Mackay City Council to save that amount of water or another dam storage will have to be built in the Mackay hinterland area. For the benefit of all, there needs to be some clear direction in that regard. We need to almost set aside dam sites that cannot be built out or that will not require huge amounts of money to enable a dam to actually be built in that area.

Unfortunately, it appears that the Labor Government has rejected the building of dams in the Mackay hinterland, whether it be Blacks Creek or Finch Hatton, or St Helens for that matter. I call on the Labor Government to be mindful of the fact that sooner or later Mackay will need additional water storage, certainly for the benefit not only of our children but also our grandchildren and those who come after.

The Finch Hatton Gorge area has been enhanced tremendously by the reopening of the Wheel of Fire walking track, which was built over a long period. It was neglected between about 1992 and 1995 because, unfortunately, a death occurred in that area and the track was closed for safety reasons. I joined with my colleague Brian Littleproud to reopen the track. Quite a lot of work was done to bring it up to speed.

I am entirely supportive of and enthusiastic about encouraging development in our national parks. I believe that sooner or later they will be a huge focus in encouraging tourism back into the Mackay region. Certainly the Eungella National Park at the top of the valley has a long way to go.

Work on the Finch Hatton Gorge was hard to undertake because of the steepness of the area and because of access difficulties. I congratulate and make special mention of the Youth Conservation Corps on its contribution to completing Stage 2 of the redevelopment of that walking track. I believe that work by these young people should be tremendously encouraged. More money should be put into encouraging the further development of our national parks.

The small boat harbour in Mackay is moving ahead strongly. Certainly it will be an interesting development in the Mackay region. The boating fraternity in Mackay has never had any sort of marina—just moorings in the commercial harbour. The surrounding wall of the marina has just been completed. That development was undertaken by the coalition in Government. I am very encouraged that it is moving ahead. The developer is now selling units in high-rise buildings that will be built around the marina. They are going very well.

The 500-berth marina will greatly enhance the facilities available to tourists and charter operators and also private boat owners who currently berth their boats both inside and outside of the commercial port. A lot of them actually berth in creeks in Mackay and the surrounding areas. The marina will also assist the fledgling game fishing industry which has been identified out to sea from Mackay. It is showing a great deal of promise. Certainly it will be part of a growing and sustainable tourist industry in the Mackay district. Of course, with that comes extra jobs and work in the hospitality industry, which I know Minister Gibbs will be very keen to hear.

There is, however, one downside in relation to the small boat harbour. Sunfish in Mackay is rather concerned about the placement of the ramp. I have referred that matter to the Parliamentary Committee of Public Works and, hopefully, we might get some interesting conclusions out of that.

Aquaculture in the Mackay region in my electorate is creating some concern amongst locals, particularly in the Armstrong Beach area. My position on aquaculture is that I believe it is a growing and

sustainable industry. I believe that, into the future, we are going to see greater development of aquaculture. Certainly a bigger proportion of our economy is going to rely heavily on the export of aquaculture products around the world. However, I do have some concerns certainly in terms of the environment and in terms of ownership. I would like to see Australians owning and operating aquaculture ventures along the Queensland coast. We really have to be very mindful of the environment in terms of outfall, recycling and those sorts of things that are inherent in the development of aquaculture.

After debate in this House yesterday, members would unfortunately be well aware that the coal industry is going through some difficult times. I was disappointed by the deferment of the Hail Creek project in the Nebo Shire, which had the potential to provide 650 jobs in my electorate in the hinterland from Mackay. That \$700m development by Pacific Coal has now been deferred for 12 months, and the project will be reviewed towards the end of this year.

I believe that our coal industry is sustainable. Unfortunately, we are going through a fairly tough time in relation to exports. However, I believe that if commonsense prevails—and certainly with the innovative work that MIM is doing in relation to productivity, which was highlighted in the House yesterday—the coal industry can meet the challenges of the world market. I hope that commonsense will prevail in that area. Unfortunately, global markets can be influenced by huge deposits and huge mines outside Australia that have far lower costs of production than we have. So we have to be innovative, have high productivity per man and get on with the job. I believe that we can do that with common goodwill between all people. Hopefully, that will happen and Hail Creek will move ahead after the end of this year.

The Dalrymple Bay coal terminal and the services terminal at Hay Point are now exceeding shipments of 50 million tonnes per year. That is growing continually. I believe that they are meeting environmental constraints in relation to coal dust and those sorts of things. It is very important, as we develop those coalmining ports, that companies are mindful of the environmental concerns relating to coal dust and those sorts of things that affect local residents. I believe that they are doing the best they can.

Of course, the major industry in my electorate is the sugar industry. As members would be aware, the past 12 months have been very difficult for the sugar industry, not only in terms of weather but also in terms of price. Heavy rains in August last year created a quagmire for harvesting operations, making the cane very difficult to harvest, and decreased the level of sugar in the cane. Those members who are familiar with the sugar industry would understand that when paddocks are bogged up or damaged, the future crops off those areas of land are also damaged. We have a return crop each year. So not only did we have a difficult harvest last year, but also the crop for this year will be depressed from that difficult harvest.

On top of that, of course, as I said earlier, the world market price has decreased from about US15c a pound two or three years ago to currently about US6.8c. That price is fluctuating from day to day. Unfortunately, on top of that the Australian dollar is now rising from about the 53c or 54c mark a little while ago into the 60s. So as the value of the Australian dollar increases and the world price of sugar decreases, the farm gate price for canefarmers decreases. In the coastal areas of Queensland—and I am now speaking about the industry in general—this is having a tremendous effect on the viability of farms. As my colleague the member for Hinchinbrook mentioned this morning, farms in the northern parts of Queensland have had low c.c.s. levels over a long period, and this is just the straw that broke the camel's back.

There are two new schools in my electorate: one at Beaconsfield and one at Marian. The provision of set-down areas in Marian is causing me some concern. Under the protocols, the council and the Education Department fund those fifty-fifty. Unfortunately, the Marian State School is a relocated school. The Mirani Shire, which covers that area, has spent quite an amount of money over the years putting infrastructure into the old school. Being a very small council with limited funds, it is having some difficulty meeting its end of the bargain. Because it is a relocated school, I call on the Minister to try to sort out that situation. The Mirani Shire Council has met with the Minister. I was part of the delegation that met at the Cabinet meeting in Mackay. Unfortunately, we have not had a solution to that. It is important that Education Queensland recognises the imposts it is putting on small councils, particularly where there is a relocated school and not necessarily a new school.

As those two schools were developed and built during the term of the coalition Government, I congratulate Bob Quinn on their development. They are excellent. I hope that the new schools that we open in the future have the same sorts of facilities. They are excellent schools which are at the cutting edge of technology. They are certainly a boon to the students.

I turn now to the issue of police. In Sarina we have a police station which, I believe, is currently understaffed. At times there have been up to nine police officers at that station. In recent times that number has dropped to four. We are certainly having an outbreak of petty crime in the area. I have

written to the Minister about this and have received letters from my constituents in the Sarina area who are very concerned about this matter. At another time I will detail some of those concerns.

One of the problems that we have in Sarina is that the police station is getting rather run down. It was certainly a high priority on the coalition's capital works budget to rebuild that station, but unfortunately it does not seem to be there any more. I hope that this Labor Government is able to meet the commitments that it made in its election promises to my electorate and wish it well in that respect.

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