



Speech by

Hon. D. HAMILL

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

Hansard 20 June 2000

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Mr R. G. Tanna

Hon. D. J. HAMILL (Ipswich—ALP) (Treasurer) (9.48 a.m.), by leave: I rise today to express my sadness at the passing of Reginald Gabriel Tanna, the long-serving and much respected General Manager of the Gladstone Port Authority. Reg passed away suddenly at his home in Gladstone on Monday, 12 June 2000. Just three days before, that is, the Friday, I had shared lunch with Reg and his wife Norma during a 20th anniversary celebration of the world-leading RG Tanna Coal Terminal, which was named after Reg in 1994 in recognition of his achievements during his 34 years at the Gladstone Port Authority. On the Friday I saw him Reg was, as ever, enthusiastic about the port and its future. I suspect he was also looking forward to his retirement, planned for 18 August. It is a terrible tragedy that his sudden passing has robbed Reg and his family of enjoying his well-deserved retirement after a lifetime of achievement.

I had a long professional association with Reg Tanna, dating back to my time as Minister for Transport. Of the great many people with whom I have had the pleasure of working, Reg stands out as one of the more outstanding leaders in public life in Queensland.

As one of eight children of a modest family living in south-west Queensland in the early 1930s, Reg had known hardship and the true value of life's necessities. Reg's family made significant sacrifices for his education. Reg was senior dux of Nudgee College and graduated with honours from the University of Queensland as a civil engineer in 1955. He often told of the struggle the family had in funding his course and was forever grateful for their sacrifices. After graduating, Reg became the sixth engineer to be engaged by the then Department of Harbours and Marine. After a brief stint in north Queensland, where he met Norma, Reg was posted to the Gladstone Harbour Board in 1966.

Reg's contribution over the next 34 years was truly remarkable. He firmly held a view that the future of Australia relied greatly upon the development of its ports. Indeed, he devoted his working life to the development of the Gladstone port. His time at the port—from 1966 to 2000—saw massive developments. Tonnage grew from 1.7 million tonnes in 1966 to 43 million tonnes in 2000, and the port which catered for vessels of 35,000 dwt when Reg went there in 1966 now accommodates bulk carriers in excess of 220,000 dwt. Reg was largely responsible for many of these developments. His integral role in the planning and development of the Clinton coal facility, now the RG Tanna Coal Terminal, saw it expand to become the world's fourth largest coal export terminal.

Beyond the Gladstone Port Authority Reg contributed greatly to many community causes in sports, education and church and charity organisations. He was a worthy recipient of the Public Service medal in 1991 and was the 1998 Gladstone City Council Citizen of the Year.

At his funeral service his long-time friend and fellow Gladstone Port Authority stalwart Bryan Jordan delivered an eloquent eulogy that drew together the many threads of the rich life led by Reg Tanna. I table a copy of that eulogy and seek leave to have it incorporated in Hansard.

Leave granted.

It may seem strange to commence a Eulogy by referring to an apple and a banana. Early in 1966 I was asked to drive a young man from the old Harbour Board office in Flinders Parade to Goondoon Street so he could buy himself some lunch, that was my first meeting with Reg Tanna. He bought an apple and a banana. Whilst the significance was not evident at the time—it is now obvious that the simple lunch reflected the man whose life we celebrate today. He was humble, simple living and abhorred any fuss and frivolous trimmings.

Reginald Gabriel Tanna was born in Toowoomba on 28th December 1933. His parents Malek and Mary had settled in Australia from Lebanon.

They had eight children, five of whom Elva, Ivy, Esme, Joe and Peter are here today. Two other brothers, Fred and Teddy, predeceased Reg.

Life was difficult for the family, hard times and shortages were well known to them.

In the late 1930s the family moved to Warwick where after much hard work a successful fruit and vegetable business was established.

Reg commenced his primary schooling with the Christian Brothers firstly in Toowoomba and then in Warwick. Towards the end of his primary years the Brothers approached his father pointing out that the young lad had great potential and should proceed to higher studies. He was enrolled at Nudgee College in Brisbane where the early predictions materialised for in 1951 he was Senior Dux of the College. He had also excelled in College Rugby Union and cricket.

He proceeded to the University of Queensland where in 1955 he graduated with honours as a Civil Engineer.

He was the only member of his family to attend University and often told of the struggle the family had in funding his course.

He never forgot the sacrifices made and his life's work I know was in thanks for those efforts.

After graduating he had the offer of a few positions and chose to go as a Cadet Engineer to the Department of Harbours and Marine, being the sixth Engineer to be engaged by the Department.

He had a deep affection and loyalty to those people in the Department who guided him in those early years—always referring to them as "my mentors".

After a time he was sent to North Queensland supervising marine construction.

This period was to culminate in his appointment as Engineer for the construction of the Mourilyan sugar wharf. Little did he know that this posting would change his life, for in the nearby town of Innisfail lived a young lady named Norma Alice Porter. Every Friday night there was a sing-a-long at the Porter's home and knowing Reg, if there was a sing-a-long he would find a way to get there.

Norma tells, as some sort of attraction developed, she sought advice from a girlfriend on what she thought of the young Engineer. The advice was—I don't know, I think his legs are too skinny.

Apparently that did not deter a romance. Reg told of how Norma would deliver snacks to him at Mourilyan, when these became hot meals he knew things were getting serious.

Reg and Norma married in 1960, their first child Catherine was born in Innisfail. The young family moved to Holland Park in Brisbane where their two sons Michael and Tony were born.

In 1966 they came to Gladstone where Reg had been offered the position of Engineer/ Manager of the Gladstone Harbour Board. The port was on the brink of expansion and the task which lay ahead of him, probably unrealised at the time, was daunting.

What was achieved during the 34 years in which he was the Chief Executive Officer is there today for all to see. It can be truthfully said that his achievements were nothing less than amazing.

His great enthusiasm for the development of this Port of Gladstone extended much further for he constantly espoused the future of this island nation depended on the development of its ports.

He furthered that belief by taking active roles in Port Associations on both the national and state levels and was at the time of his death Chairman of the Queensland Ports Association. He also served and took a great interest in the International Association of Ports and Harbors.

Allied to his love of the Port, was his love of the city and he worked vigorously for many causes.

He was a past member of Lions and was Chairman of the Gladstone Sports and Parks Development Committee which included developing the sporting and recreational complex known as the Greenbelt in the centre of Gladstone. His work in that regard is commemorated by a park which was named in his honour. He was always interested in welfare and was Chairman of the fundraising committee for the Blue Nursing Services, Hibiscus Gardens Hostel, he also served for a time as a member of the Gladstone Salvation Army Red Shield Committee.

In the sporting field he was a Life Member and past President of Gladstone Tennis Association. In the educational fields, he served as Chairman both of the Central Queensland Institute of TAFE and the Gladstone College and was a member of the Council of the Gladstone Campus of Central Queensland University. In addition to these public offices, he quietly assisted many others in the community in various private ways.

In June 1991 he was awarded in the Australian Honours List, the Public Service Medal for outstanding service and in 1998 he was named Citizen of the Year by Gladstone City Council. In 1994 the Gladstone Port Authority paid him the ultimate honour by naming its major coal handling facility the R G Tanna Coal Terminal.

Proud as he was of his achievements and awards, Reg Tanna remained a very humble, simple living man. He shunned material possessions—the asset he prized most was his family.

His influence and love extended beyond his immediate family to branches of his paternal and maternal families throughout Australia.

He has been described by members of those families as the one who made a real difference to the family in Australia. He was considered by them to be a diplomat and a peacemaker.

Reg was a man of strong faith, regularly attending his Church and no matter where he was in the world he would seek out a Church for his Sunday mass. He applied his talents in planning to this Parish and many of the Parish developments had input from him.

This humble extraordinary man loved to have people around him. Norma and Reg's home was a gathering place where companionship and hospitality flowed freely. This is exemplified by a message received this week from a young lady in England, who said "The only place I want to be in the world is in Reg and Norma's kitchen in Higgins Street with the tele on and the fridge open".

The only time reserved to himself was Friday night and Saturday afternoons. It was then that Reg immersed himself in his only real hobby and that was his love of horse racing—something he vigorously pursued with modest investment—and even more modest returns.

His life may be ended but the thousands whose lives he touched over the years won't forget this man of greatness who displayed humility, generosity, faith in his fellow men and a strength of character that was an inspiring example.

Reg loved to sing and may I conclude by reading some words of a song made famous by his favourite singer Frank Sinatra. To me and I am sure to many here they say a lot about the man we celebrate today, Reginald Gabriel Tanna.

MY WAY

And now the end is near, and so I face the final curtain

My friend, I'll say it clear, I'll state my case of which I'm certain.

I've lived a life that's full, I've travelled each and ev'ry highway

But more, much more than this, I did it my way.

Regrets I've had a few, but then again, too few to mention.

I did what I had to do and saw it through without exemption.

I planned each charted course, each careful step along the byway

But more, much more than this, I did it my way.

Mr HAMILL: Reg Tanna's passing is a matter of deep sadness. I take this opportunity to convey this expression of sympathy to Norma and to their children and grandchildren. Gladstone has lost one of its great citizens and we have all lost a great Queenslander.
