



Speech by

DESLEY BOYLE

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

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FUEL PRICES

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (6.29 p.m.): I join with honourable members of the House in supporting this motion. I am sure that there is not a constituent in Cairns who would not want me on my feet tonight supporting this motion—in fact, not only in Cairns but in far north Queensland.

I heard on a news bulletin before I came into the House an hour or so ago that our Prime Minister, John Howard, is stuck in Darwin as we speak. Apparently his VIP jet has a mechanical fault and he is waiting in Darwin until that is fixed. What a pity he does not get in a car and drive from Darwin to Canberra. How instructive would that be for our Prime Minister! He might in fact discover how big a country is Australia. The "prime miniature", as he was referred to in the Weekend Australian by Phillip Adams, may develop some perspective on the sheer size of our country.

But more than that, our Prime Minister might discover in his drive just how expensive petrol is and how much the price of petrol varies right across the north of Australia, with no apparent rationality. If the Prime Minister drove through the area and along the way filled up at petrol stations, then he might also discover how relatively empty are the roads of northern Australia. Sure, there are the trucks and the business vehicles plying the roads, but the roads are empty of the caravans and campervans of all of those independent travellers upon whom many of these small communities in northern Australia rely for their tourism business. Mostly, these caravanners and campervanners—these travellers around our fair country—are young ones who have set out to discover their nation or are those of more advanced years who have retired and now have the time to travel and explore this country. Sadly, the reports, certainly in the area of far-north Queensland, are that those people can no longer afford their long dreamed of trips due to rising petrol prices.

If the Prime Minister stopped at some of the truck stops and the garages along the way and chatted to the people while refuelling with petrol or refuelling with food he would discover that the increase in petrol prices is a really dreadful impost on business and that many businesses, particularly trucking businesses, are at great risk of insolvency in the near future. The tremendous additional costs to those trucking businesses, whose trucks bring essential items to rural and remote communities, is a load that they cannot manage for much longer. The ability to compete of the big buses that carry not only Australian tourists but also international tourists is also severely limited owing to the increase in fuel prices.

Who else would the Prime Minister meet on his travels? He may meet some pensioners or older people on limited incomes who are wanting to visit relatives and are travelling the roads to reach their families in cities such as Mount Isa, Longreach or Cairns. He would hear from them that rising fuel prices are a dreadful impost upon them. In places such as Cairns itself, the Prime Minister would hear from businesses about the increase in fuel prices. In fact, a fellow in the Cairns area has built up a truck and earthmoving business through 16 years of hard work. His information to the member for Barron River was that the cost in diesel for him has gone from \$12,000 to \$17,000 in a short period. Of course, his business cannot sustain that increase each month.

The Prime Minister would also hear from people in Innisfail. I have been told by the member for Mulgrave that in the course of their ordinary travel, his constituents lose an extra \$20 a week out of their pockets as a result of the increase in petrol prices. For the people of Cairns City, the increase in petrol

prices means an extra \$7 to \$10 out of their pockets. The Prime Minister would also hear the anger of these constituents, because he is not listening to the people of northern Australia. As to the extra funding for roads, we all say "High time", and we hope that we in far-north Queensland get our share.

Mr Howard should listen to these people. The petrol price rises are not tolerable. He should cut his excise in February next year, and he should not expect to get re-elected in the year 2001.
