



Speech by

Hon. V. LESTER

MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

Hansard 9 November 2000

APPROPRIATION BILL [No. 2]; APPROPRIATION [PARLIAMENT] BILL [No. 2]

Hon. V. P. LESTER (Keppel—NPA) (2.50 p.m.): One of the concerns that I have, and I am very genuine about it, is the spread of noxious weeds in Queensland and indeed Australia. I am not necessarily blaming this Government. I can recall when parthenium weed first started to spread, and that was when Ken Tomkins was the Minister for Lands. While some action was taken at that time, I do believe stronger action could have been taken and we might have eliminated this weed, which is indeed a curse.

Since then, there have been many other weeds introduced from various other countries. We are very much becoming a global community. We have seen the giant rat's tail grass introduced into central Queensland, in particular. On this occasion I have to say that this Government and the Federal Government have to do more to really grapple with these problems, because the more these very serious noxious weeds spread, the less ability we will have to produce, and it is as simple as that.

We talk a lot about conservation, but the basic ways of conserving our land are to indeed deal with the issue of weeds that spread throughout our State rendering much land useless. A property north of Marlborough that I recently inspected had a carrying capacity of 1,800 head of cattle. That capacity is now down to 600 and all the evidence is that this weed will totally choke out this property and render it useless. That means, of course, properties nearby are being affected as well.

So my real message is that we have to deal with this problem. It is extremely serious. We need to not only implement biological control and employ additional scientists, but where a lot of these weeds can be attacked manually I believe we should use the better type of prisoner or, if possible, use the Army to bring the problem under control. We really must get serious and attack it in a very big way.

Imported weeds tend to grow better in Australia than they do in their own country, as is the case with some of our gums in California; they grow much better there than they do here.

Mr Swarten: And in South Africa, the blue gums.

Mr LESTER: Yes, that is right. Of course, in South Africa they have this giant rat's tail grass.

Mr Swarten interjected.

Mr LESTER: We have got it in Yeppoon all right.

I also make another call for further funding for national parks. A lot of work has been done in trying to provide funding for national parks, but more is needed. I do not think it is unreasonable of me to say that Fraser Island is degenerating as a tourist area because of a lack of maintenance. People like George Done have contacted me in recent days again calling on me to visit that park to make the appropriate comments about the lack of maintenance there. It is a great pity that there is a lack of maintenance there.

I move now to comment on some parts of the Keppel electorate. I appreciate the work that has been done on the road between Emu Park and Rockhampton. There has been, in recent years, a lot of permanent widening done. A temporary widening of that road has also been completed. Temporary widenings are what I say they are. They have been useful, but we are at a point where further permanent widening works need to be done on the Rockhampton-Emu Park Road. I signal that issue at this point.

While the Main Roads statisticians tell me that there is not sufficient traffic on the Rockhampton-Yeppoon road for a double lane highway, I ask these people to look to the future and just recognise the huge growth of that area. It is the eighth fastest growing area in Australia at present and the third fastest growing area in Queensland. I believe we might even do better than that as time goes on. We do need double lane highways on busy roads like that. There has, unfortunately, been a couple of very bad head-ons in recent times resulting in very serious injury and death.

The police station that I have been talking about which is to be situated at Cawarral is a very necessary addition to the fine services that we have in the area. The district includes Keppel Sands, Cawarral, Mount Chalmers and Coowoonga. The existence of removable temporary police stations at Emu Park and, I understand, Gracemere means that the time is right for the placing of a police station there. I know that the Police Minister will tell me that this is an operational matter and it is to be decided by the police department's senior officers. It is, however, my role to signal in Parliament that the police station is needed there. These areas are all growing at a very fast rate and obviously a single officer station there would be very appropriate. There is no reason that it cannot be done and I would like to see it done along the lines of community policing that has been trialled by the Criminal Justice Commission where the officer gets to know everybody in the community. They can actually prevent a lot of crime because they know what is going on. We need to be preventive rather than responsive. While I think the world of all of the people in Cawarral, Coowoonga, Keppel Sands and Mount Chalmers, it is a simple fact of life that as the population grows we will have more crime.

The Minister for Public Works is looking at me. I want to thank him for coming to Cawarral to inspect the addition of the preschool there. That was very good work done by the Public Works Department. It was a top project—the very latest in the area. Where possible, local contractors were employed and generally it was a very good effort.

Mr Schwarten: We had a good day.

Mr LESTER: It was a good day. We made it a totally non-political day, just giving credit to the people.

Mr Schwarten: Being good neighbours.

Mr LESTER: Yes, and it was good to see. The people of Cawarral appreciated it. Of course, every time we get an addition like this people contact me about the need for additional services such as a police station and so on.

Before I finish what I had intended to say—which was approximately 10 minutes' worth—I need to signal the great concern that exists in Yeppoon at present. There is a move to take away permanent fire officer surveillance in that area. That is unbelievable when an area is growing at such a fast rate. We have always had a permanent officer available 24 hours a day in case of a fire. Those four officers are now going to be placed on daytime duties. This means that during the night, when some of the worst fires occur, we will not have the services of permanent officers. The fire authorities tell me that they could be contacted if the fire is really serious, but this has caused concern in the Yeppoon area.

I raised this matter with Merri Rose when she was the Minister for Emergency Services and she gave me a commitment that nothing would happen with the fire officers. Well, it did not happen while she was Minister, and that is fine, but it is starting to happen now that she is not the Minister responsible for that portfolio. The appropriate people will hear from me. I shall be doing what Vince Lester does best in no uncertain terms.

Mr Kaiser: Make cream buns.

Mr LESTER: I will do more than that. I am concerned that a person in the Labor Party as senior as the member would make such a remark over such a serious issue. The member should be fighting for me and taking to task those people in authority who are trying to take away my permanent fire officers. I look forward to the member's support and not his ridicule. I am having a meeting in a few days' time and I would hate to have to tell those people that the member was ridiculing my efforts in the Parliament. If the member behaves himself from now on, I will save him that embarrassment. I have every right to raise the issue and fight for it with every ounce of energy that I possess. I will do that.

I have distributed various news items about the way in which I am going to deal with this matter. I will deal with it very fairly. I will make sure that people in authority at the fire service have an opportunity to explain to the public why these things are being done. It will be left for the public to judge this matter.

The ball is in the Government's court. I await further developments. This matter will be handled fairly and justly by me, but it will also be handled in the interests of my constituents. The 10 minutes that I promised to take is up, and I thank the Parliament for its forbearance in listening to me.
