



Speech by

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CHANNEL 10 NEWS, CAIRNS

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (11.45 a.m.): In Cairns last week, we heard the sudden and shocking news that Channel 10's local television news had been axed. In fact, the staff of Channel 10 were informed at around 10.30 on Wednesday of last week that Friday night's news would be their last. After over 20 years of local news in Cairns, this was to be the end, so the relatively new owners of Channel 10, Southern Cross Broadcasting, informed the staff. Then at around 4.30 p.m. on that same day they called the staff to say, 'We have changed our minds. Tonight will be the last local news.' There was not even a chance to put together a goodbye program.

It is an act of private sector bastardry and that is exactly what it should be termed, and it is important that not only people in Cairns and across far-north Queensland express their absolute rejection of this kind of profiteering by the private sector but that others around Queensland do so as well. It is not only Cairns and the far north that has lost its local news, but other regional centres in Queensland and also, I am told, Darwin in the Northern Territory.

What does this mean for Cairns? First up, it means the loss of 12 jobs and that affects not only those 12 people but also their families. It threatens us in terms of keeping their important skills in a community such as Cairns. It is a slap in the face for all of the present staff who have worked so hard to provide a quality service—Jamie Rule, Danae Jones, David Thompson, Michelle Carey and others in front of the camera and behind the camera and in the studio. There are also others from years past who have brought us the news across the broader area of far-north Queensland.

The loss is also about a loss of local communications in a region that is huge. From Cairns to the tip of Cape York is 1,000 kilometres. We need that news, as it were, from the Torres Strait, Cape York, Cairns and the tablelands for regional cohesion and, of course, many of the stories that come out of the far north are national stories that people in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane should know about. This loss is also about the importance of communications as essential infrastructure. It is not just a matter of a private sector product to be sold, to be axed according to private sector profits. It is about essential infrastructure communications right across the northern half of our country.

I was for a time chair of the Northern Australia Development Council and I know that in communities from Kalgoorlie to Cairns right across the top half of our country—in particular, Exmouth and Darwin—and through to Queensland, whether it is road or rail or air communications or communications via television and radio, they are essential to the survival of communities in the north. Of course, this is a matter for the newly re-elected federal government. What has it done? Very little so far! Senator Alston, the responsible minister, is upset. I say to Senator Alston that that is not enough; we want more. Millions of our taxpayers' dollars have been paid to this company, supposedly on an agreement that would ensure that there was no roll back of services, no diminution of services to regional areas in the switch from analogue to digital. I think that Senator Alston should have a letter of demand for those millions of dollars on the desk of the chief executive officer of Southern Cross Broadcasting. That might make it think.

In the meantime, Cairns is not taking this news lying down. There will be a rally tomorrow. Although hundreds will be there, I am sorry that I cannot join them, as I am sure is the member for Mulgrave, Warren Pitt, and the member for Barron River, Lesley Clark. We are trying an advertising boycott—maybe that will hit the pockets of this company and make it realise—a listening boycott and, if we can, we will affect the price of their shares. This is a matter that not only members in regional areas

should take up but I ask all members of this House to take up. If we do not have communications right across the length and breadth of far-north Queensland, if we do not have the essential service provided by local news, then we have no hope of keeping regional and remote communities alive. I ask members to please make their presence felt at all levels to Southern Cross Broadcasting for this dreadful act of profiteering at the expense of our country.
