



Speech by

Mr M. HORAN

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NATIONAL PARTY TOUR OF QUEENSLAND

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.30 a.m.): In recent weeks I have had the opportunity to visit several parts of Queensland along with my colleagues in the National Party—places such as the Gold Coast, Cairns, Innisfail, the Atherton Tableland and the Emerald and Cloncurry districts. During these visits we had the opportunity to meet with enormous numbers of people—community leaders, businesspeople, local farmers, manufacturers, small business operators and, particularly, residents.

Firstly, I thank all of those communities for the hospitality they showed to my parliamentary colleagues and me during our visit. On our trip to the Gold Coast I was accompanied by one of my shadow ministers, the member for Maroochydore. Interestingly, the people in the area want an acknowledgment of the fact that theirs is the sixth biggest city in Australia. They want recognition of the desperate need in the area for a properly integrated local transport system that connects with the magnificent freeway put in place by the former Borbidge coalition government. They would like to see the local transport system linked up with that freeway and the rail line.

On our trip to far-north Queensland I was joined by my deputy, the shadow minister for state development and small business, transport and main roads, aboriginal and islander policy, Vaughan Johnson, and the shadow minister for primary industries and forestry and northern development, Mr Marc Rowell. This was a particularly interesting trip. It was very much a listening trip. We met with representatives from the sugar industry and canegrowers. They raised issues relating to the closure and opening of the South Johnstone mill, the low prices in the previous season, the seasonal effects—that is, the wet season—experienced there, the cane grub problem, which really needs to be addressed, and also the need to establish a mill suppliers committee to look out for the best interests of the area's growers.

We also had the chance to meet with a number of trawlermen. We were highly impressed by the commitment of those trawler operators—hardworking people that they are—to the environment and how they are trying to work through any issues they face. These are the sorts of people we want to stand up for. They are doing their level best through their work to take into consideration the protection of the environment and the Great Barrier Reef. It is important that they are recognised for doing so and that the officials and bureaucrats take notice of that and do not trample over these people in their efforts to work closely with the environment.

We heard the serious concerns of banana growers about the outbreak of black sigatoka and the lack of funding given by the DPI to help farmers cope with this very serious problem. We also heard about general issues affecting the whole region, particularly the Atherton Tableland, where people are looking to the National Party for support. We heard from dairy farmers and small business owners, primary producers, transport industry representatives, mining workers, irrigators and tobacco farmers. We spoke to ship builders in the Cairns area who have the potential to win a tender for a new fleet of ships for the Navy—something that would provide many jobs in the Cairns area. We spoke to rural action groups, tourism heads and particularly to young people looking to their future. We were highly impressed by the young people we spoke to and the ideas they had for their area.

General frustration was expressed about government processes and about people in rural and regional areas being overlooked. Tourism is a potentially huge income earner for Cairns, but the feeling

is that the government is failing them on so many fronts in promoting the industry and particularly in helping to attract scheduled and charter airline flights into Cairns.

Farmers are particularly frustrated with the continued cutbacks in DPI staffing and the subsequent effect on the running of their business. Some 550 positions have been lost over the past three years. However, in the face of bureaucratic bungling and constant setbacks the people of these areas work tirelessly to ensure that their region remains viable through sustainable businesses such as tourism and other growth industries. They are fighting to protect and improve on all of those things that make their region so great.

The National Party is out there listening and learning from the issues and concerns raised by these people at the grassroots level. More importantly, we are representing and acting on behalf of these people in bringing forward these issues to the parliament so that some action can be taken to improve these problems.

I wish to acknowledge the organisers of the Aggrow field days in Emerald, which I officially opened as part of our most recent listening tour. It was a wonderful display of industry, manufacturing and equipment from across the state, as well as stud cattle from around the regions. The Deputy Leader and shadow Minister for Transport and Main Roads, Vaughan Johnson, also attended and presented Emerald Agricultural College student Adam McLaughlin with a \$500 bursary for his efforts in studying agricultural beef production at the college. I congratulate my colleague on his generosity and commitment to young people. It was marvellous to see a young fellow with such a desire to get into primary industries. He comes from the hinterland of the Gold Coast and is a typical example of the young Queenslanders we should be helping.

I also had discussions with local industry representatives. We had a number of deputations whilst at the field days. I was joined by my shadow Minister for Natural Resources and Mines, Police and Corrective Services, Mr Jeff Seeney, and my shadow Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Fair Trading, Innovation, Information Technology and Rural Technology, Mr Lawrence Springborg. The innovation and enterprise we saw in the Emerald and Cloncurry districts could best be described as impressive, and I wish to give credit to those communities for the work they are doing and for their excellent contribution to making this state great.

There are some very exciting projects in the area. The Emerald area now boasts the largest irrigated citrus orchard in the southern hemisphere and is looking towards a rich future in developing horticultural industries and the export potential that goes with those. It was fantastic to see the incredible impact on growth that the development of the Fairbairn Dam has had on this region, which boasts industries ranging from cotton, dryland grain, beef, live cattle exports, table grape production as well as a large portion of Australia's exports in domestic coal, methane and natural gas.

If ever there was an example of what a major dam and associated irrigation system can do to provide jobs for Queenslanders—whether they be for skilled, semiskilled, unskilled or professional people; jobs for young Queenslanders; export income for this state; and, more importantly, the flexibility of opportunity in these areas—it is what is happening in Emerald today as a result of the Fairbairn Dam that the previous National Party-led government and coalition had the foresight to see as being so important to the area.

Importantly, the region's irrigators have expressed major concerns about the government-owned corporation SunWater and the way it is currently being run. They spoke to us about the concern that the board of SunWater does not have a single irrigator on its membership. We think it would be essential to have an experienced irrigator on the board of SunWater. No wonder it does not understand the problems in so many of these irrigation areas. They spoke about the security of tenure of their water system and its effect on their future. They spoke about the accountability of SunWater's pricing system and the new pricing regimes that SunWater is endeavouring to put in place around the state, about the expense of the operation, and generally about the way it is being run as a government-owned corporation.

We have struck this all across the state. In the Bundaberg city area there is concern about the new pricing regimes. In the Mareeba, the Bundaberg, the Burdekin, and now the Emerald and the central Queensland irrigation areas concern is being expressed by irrigators about the operations of SunWater, about the lack of consultation with the local advisory water boards where there is significant knowledge and expertise, and about the way in which the new pricing regime is being jacked up so that our exports and products will lose their competitive edge because of increased costs in the basic operations of these irrigation farms. I share their concerns, as I am hearing similar frustration expressed by people all around the state. The National Party has pledged to continue pursuing this issue in the parliament on their behalf. I share their concerns, as I am hearing similar frustration from people all around the state. The National Party has pledged to continue pursuing this issue here in the parliament on their behalf.

In far-north Queensland again we heard the extreme concern about the prospect of losing the 24-hour, seven-day-a-week service of DPI inspectors in the Cloncurry region, particularly at saleyards. It is absolutely essential to maintain that export industry, particularly of live cattle. It is a desperate need for those services to be available. As with so many areas of Queensland, the region is staring down the barrel of a number of major water issues. The town water supply is in dire straits. They need particular assistance for increased town water supply.

On the subject of funding allocations for bore capping in Queensland, people from Stanbroke Pastoral Company talked to us about the lack of government commitment to that wonderful scheme and the lack of government commitment to the control of weeds. There is a need in Cloncurry for some funding to help them establish an exciting project, the discovery centre in Cloncurry. It is wonderful to see that people in that area are endeavouring to put that project into place.

These are some of the issues that matter to Queenslanders. They want jobs, development, service delivery, health, education, adequate policing and sufficient funding for government services, particularly the DPI. They are frustrated when they see projects like the \$24 million footbridge in Brisbane. I am talking about small amounts of money that would mean so much in their particular town. The Queensland Nationals will keep fighting for these people across Queensland.
