



Speech by

**ROSA LEE LONG**

**MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS**

---

Hansard 2 May 2001

#### **FIRST SPEECH**

**Ms LEE LONG** (Tablelands—ONP) (5.44 p.m.): Firstly, I pledge my loyalty to the Crown, Australia and Queensland. Next, Mr Deputy Speaker, I congratulate you and the Speaker on your election to high office. Special thanks also go to the people in the Tablelands electorate for choosing me to be their representative. I can assure all the voters, whether they voted for me or not, that I will at all times represent them all to the best of my ability. Thanks also go to the team who assisted me throughout the campaign, short and sharp as it was, and to all the booth workers and scrutineers who manned all 29 booths in such wet and miserable conditions on that Saturday of the election. To Peter, Mike and Des, May and Bev, Len and Betty: you were all super. To my daughters Jackie, Michelle and Vicki: a big thankyou.

Mr Deputy Speaker, allow me to introduce my electorate to you. The Tablelands electorate is one of the most diversified in Australia and geographically is situated in one of the nation's richest food bowls. Because of our proximity to Asia and with our ability to produce so much in the way of foodstuffs—we are already the smart part of the state—all we need now is a smart government to encourage manufacturing.

The two major towns in the electorate are Atherton and Mareeba. Mareeba services the northern end of the electorate and is the main centre for the Mareeba-Dimbulah Irrigation Area, which was opened up after the building of the Tinaroo Dam in 1956. The supply of water to this area really made it boom. Out of that grew the large tobacco industry, which prospered until recent years, when government in its wisdom decided to close down the industry and import tobacco and tobacco products—at a time when Australians are using more tobacco products than ever. It decided to give jobs, jobs, jobs to people in foreign countries instead of to our own people, as this was in line with the government's push towards globalisation.

Mareeba has also seen in relatively recent times the loss of its meatworks, bacon factory, railway and sawmill. After the loss of the tobacco industry, farmers, being smart and innovative people, diversified into rice, tea-tree, fruit, vegetables and other industries, only to find governments once again preferring to cut tariffs and import goods, thus providing jobs to foreigners instead of to our own children. The people are becoming increasingly angry and frustrated, as no matter which way they turn they run into brick walls.

Sugarcane is now being grown increasingly across the electorate, with a new mill being established between Atherton and Mareeba a few years ago. Although sugar prices have been at record lows for many years, we are hopeful that the next crop will see better returns. Mareeba is the centre for many small outlying towns and communities such as Chillagoe to the west, which is the last outpost before reaching the larger cattle grazing properties. Chillagoe has renowned limestone caves which are a great tourist attraction. To the north are Julatten and Mount Molloy, in the hinterland beyond the coastal towns of Mossman and Port Douglas. Cattle, fruit, vegetables and cane are the main products there. The Bibboohrah, Bilwon and Emerald Creek areas also rely on Mareeba for services.

Mareeba is only a 45-minute drive from Cairns. It has a very dry climate and one can predict fine weather there for about 90 per cent of the year. This makes it an ideal centre for sporting activities and

industry. It also has many of the attributes necessary for a future international airport, particularly if we had a more direct route to Cairns.

Atherton is the most central town in the Tablelands electorate and is situated in the middle of rich volcanic agricultural land. It boasts the Golden Triangle, which is a large expanse of flat agricultural land where most crops can be grown extremely well. In the past maize, peanuts and potatoes were extensively grown, but since deregulation of the maize industry by Labor's Ed Casey very little maize is now grown. Peanuts and potatoes are now being overtaken by sugarcane as farmers diversify in the hope of better returns.

Atherton also services an extensive reach of country to its south and west—country that ranges from dense rainforest to savanna-style grazing land and is home to a number of large cattle stations. The gateway to this western country is the remote outpost of Mount Garnet, famous for its annual race meeting, which draws thousands of spectators from many parts of Queensland and interstate. North-east of Mount Garnet lies the town of Ravenshoe, which once had a thriving dairy and timber industry. There are still some dairy farmers left, but the timber industry has all but come to a standstill since World Heritage listing came into effect. There is one major mill left, which mainly deals in pine. Another small family mill has just closed because it could not obtain a viable stand of timber from Forestry, even though it had orders to fill. The conditions written into the lease by the Department of Natural Resources were so onerous that the miller could not possibly comply with them all and still harvest the millable timber.

Herberton, closer to Atherton, was once well known for its mining. There are still many mining sites in the Tablelands electorate but, as we all know, mining has come to a virtual standstill since the inception of native title. The hardest hit, naturally, have been the small miners, who for the past 10 years or so have not been able to process ore and as a result have not been able to provide for their families, because the government is unable to make up its mind as to how native title is going to work and there is no sunset clause in legislation to date. Meanwhile, mining machinery worth millions lies depreciating at a great cost to the miner. Once again, due to government intervention, miners' livelihoods and assets have been stripped away through no fault of their own. The effects have been felt throughout the community—not to mention there has been economic loss to the state.

Another town of substance in the electorate is Malanda. Malanda has always been the hub of the dairy industry on the tableland. Before deregulation, when farmers were receiving a reasonable price for their milk—around 58c per litre for market milk—they could afford to maintain and upkeep their farms by fertilising their paddocks, maintaining their roads and fences, upgrading their dairies, and so on. They were not told that, within six months, the price would drop to its present average of 25c to 28c per litre, a rate at which farmers cannot survive for long. Now, small businesses in the town are really feeling the pinch as the remaining farmers tighten their belts more and more and more.

Malanda has a very large and modern dairy factory employing many local people. A few years ago, the factory became part of the huge Dairyfarmers cooperative. As part of recent upgrading, with most of the money provided by Dairyfarmers and a small amount promised by the state government, the cooperative hopes to install a large stretch mozzarella cheese plant that will take over from the present cheddar cheese plant. We are living in the hope that this factory will remain viable. An annual turnover of some \$100 million comes from market milk, cream, cheese, butter and casein. It is not hard to see that the industry has been of great value not only to my electorate but also to the economy of Queensland as a whole. But with deregulation, the future certainly looks bleak.

The Malanda area also had a large timber and veneer mill at Peeramon, which employed many people until it was closed down due to World Heritage, with the loss of many jobs. Dairying has been the industry that has kept nearby Millaa Millaa alive after the loss of its sawmill. Now, with dairy industry deregulation impacting on the area, this small town will be lucky to survive. Already the local butcher shop has closed, and other businesses are feeling the pinch. Yungaburra and Kairi, east of Atherton, also lost sawmills to World Heritage.

With the redistribution of boundaries, the Tablelands electorate now takes in East Palmerston, on the Palmerston Highway, and extends to Mena Creek, south-west of the coastal town of Innisfail. The main industries are cane and bananas. Most of the canefarmers in the area supply the South Johnstone mill. However, the mill recently went into receivership and, subsequently, has been purchased by the foreign-owned Bundaberg Sugar Company at a bargain basement price. To add to the tale of woe, banana farmers are now faced with the banana disease black sigatoka. It cannot be emphasised enough how important it is not to import from pest-affected countries at all to safeguard our own product. Our quarantine system must be stepped up.

Generally speaking, we have the best, most efficient and smartest farmers in the country, and we are very proud of them. The miners and timberworkers were also some of the best. Their input into the economy of Queensland has been enormous. Without these people in rural and regional areas producing goods, where will the money come from to keep the city people in jobs? The rural and regional people are the backbone of the nation. Drought and flooding rains have not caused these

problems; they are the result of inappropriate decisions of man. Make no mistake about it, the country people may be affected first by national competition policy and the government's push towards globalisation, privatisation and the foreign ownership of our assets, but it will eventually catch up with our city dwellers.

Earlier in my speech I mentioned a number of small towns which had suffered due to the closure of local sawmills through the introduction of World Heritage. Last year, Queensland celebrated 'A Hundred Years of Forestry'. Certainly the first nine decades of the century gave us something to celebrate. During this time, forestry made a significant contribution to the economy and development of the state and was a major source of employment in many regional areas. A practical management system for state forests recognised the diversity of public demand for use of the forests and provided a balance of environmental conservation, production and public recreation. Queensland built up a corps of highly skilled forest managers and developed sustainable forest harvesting practices that were internationally recognised as world's best practice. Plantation programs were initiated throughout the state in a responsible endeavour to supplement our natural resources and provide for our timber needs in the future.

Atherton had one of the biggest district offices, from which it controlled selective logging. It was so well done that we had tourists and southern politicians alike come and marvel at what 'beautiful, pristine, virgin rainforest' we had. They were naive; for that same rainforest had been so well and so selectively logged over and over and over again for nearly a century that no-one could tell the difference. So in its wisdom, the government decided to call it 'World Heritage' and lock it up. The former Forestry Department, which had very efficiently and effectively managed the forests, was dissected and its bits left struggling in the bureaucracy of other organisations.

Large areas of forest which provided a sustainable supply of high-quality timber have been withdrawn from production, and expansion of plantation programs has all but ceased. As a consequence, many sawmills in rural centres in north Queensland have been forced to close. Hundreds and hundreds of jobs were lost directly and indirectly. These forests now lie idle and unproductive while our government, once again in its wisdom, sees fit to import timber from foreign countries which clear-fell, not selectively log for the benefit of future generations. This, to me and my constituents and all the people who lost their jobs, livelihoods and assets and way of life, is the height of hypocrisy. It is a total indictment against the Premier that the Tablelands Labor candidate did not succeed in the recent election. The result reflects the distrust and apathy felt by my constituents for the Premier—their own 'home town boy'.

With regard to health, I know that I am not alone in this state when I despair about our public health system. Leading up to the last election, the Premier was heard to boast that Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen was his mentor. Well, the Premier has big boots to fill, because we in Queensland remember that when Joh was in office we had the best free hospital system in the world. Now, people are being turned away from the hospital system because it cannot cope. Many pensioners who have paid their due taxes find that, in some cases, there is a waiting list for health or dental services of up to three years. I know that the Health Minister will dispute this, so I have taken the liberty of bringing with me a letter from a constituent. The letter states—

I wish to air my grievance re the hospital dental clinic.

I have just paid \$1,100.00 to have my teeth attended to by a private dentist. Prior to this, on inquiring at the clinic as to when I could see a dentist I was told there was a 35 month waiting list unless it was on emergency. At the time it wasn't though. I knew my teeth needed attention. I am 78 years old and because I've taken good care of them I am fortunate enough to still have most of my own teeth. It is less than 12 months since I had a filling replaced so I've been able to have them checked fairly regularly—until now. This is no reflection on the staff at the clinic whom I've always found to be courteous and helpful. I find it absolutely appalling that at my age, I can't get the service at the local clinic to which I am entitled. I get a pension which I feel I am justly entitled to.

The best of British luck to you in your quest to get a better service at our hospital. Peter Beattie boasts of being an Atherton boy. Never have our hospital facilities been in worse shape. He and Wendy Edmonds should hang their heads in shame.

That is the end of the section I wish to quote, but this is one of many complaints against the public health system received in my office. It seems that unless a person qualifies as an emergency case, their alternative is to go to a private doctor or dentist and pay the gap between the scheduled fee and what the doctor charges. This means that, generally speaking, there is no free hospital or dental system unless it is an emergency or a person is prepared to wait in a long queue. So what are we paying taxes for? Our health workers, like all public servants, are bound by codes of conduct which restrict them from speaking out in public, to the media or even to their local MP about the parlous state of the health system. To do so, they risk being demoted or even losing their jobs. Is this democracy? I think not!

On the subject of education, there are a large number of schools in my electorate—about 30 at last count—including primary, high and private. There is always a cry for more funding, but the stock answer from government is that there are no funds available. The teachers do a fine job, considering

their hands are tied as far as discipline is concerned. The responsibilities required of them over and above the call of duty are of concern.

Touching on roads, we must have some of the worst roads in the state in the Tablelands electorate, and I feel that we get no more than crumbs when it comes to funding.

On law and order, the fact that ordinary people have to bar up their homes while petty criminals get a rap over the knuckles and are let out to reoffend speaks volumes. When a person comes onto your property, has an accident and then can sue you, it indicates that something is dreadfully wrong with the system. It seems our globalist governments are hell-bent on turning us into a very un-Australian nation by encouraging us to become a suing society, a dob-in society, a politically correct society and a red tape society.

I would like to dispel the perception that One Nation is racist. That is just political propaganda. My late husband was Australian born of Chinese descent and the Asian people I have met have been some of the nicest and most honest citizens—not to mention the best cooks.

We in One Nation are fighting for Australians, all Australians, no matter what colour or creed. We are against the takeover of small individuals by big corporate companies. We are fighting for the little Aussie battler, for the Davids against the Goliaths on a local level, on a national level and now, with the new buzz word 'globalisation', on an international level.

Who or what is this monster called globalisation? Why are the major parties subservient to it? Our national assets are being privatised one by one and sold off to foreign multinationals at Australia's expense. Industry after industry is being closed down in the name of deregulation so similar goods can be imported. By importing we are denying our own children their right to jobs while we create work for people in a foreign country.

In my electorate alone we have witnessed the destruction of our timber industry, our tobacco industry and our mining industry and now we are witnessing the disintegration of our once proud dairy industry. And while our farmers desperately diversify into other crops in a bid to save some of their assets, our globalisation governments put every obstacle in their way by importing what we can produce ourselves and by removing tariffs to make it even easier for foreign producers to compete.

In my electorate the Beattie government in Labor's last term introduced tree-clearing laws on freehold land, put up rural valuations by up to 300 per cent, and now irrigation water charges are being significantly increased.

When will this madness end? Our leaders in government do not seem to care about how their policies affect ordinary people. Now the people have had enough. In my electorate they are very angry at the loss of their livelihoods and their assets.

It is time we were able to give our children real hope for the future. People want changes in government policy, and One Nation intends to support them in their fight for change. Thank you.

---