



Speech by

Mr T. MALONE

MEMBER FOR MIRANI

Hansard 4 April 2001

ADDRESS IN REPLY

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (4.38 p.m.): Mr Deputy Speaker, in speaking to the motion for the adoption of the Address in Reply to His Excellency's speech at the opening of the 50th Parliament, I confirm my loyalty to my constituents and to Her Majesty the Queen and to her representative, His Excellency the Governor. Mr Deputy Speaker, I believe that the Governor, Major General Peter Arnison, is an excellent role model. He moves among our community to meet the people and to promote Queensland in a positive light and he also encourages young people to achieve in our community.

Mr Deputy Speaker, would you please convey to the Speaker my personal congratulations on his appointment to this most important and honoured office of Speaker of this parliament. There are many challenges before the Speaker of this parliament. Not least of those is supplying the support that members of this parliament need to do their job on behalf of the constituents in their communities.

I record my appreciation to the people of the Mirani electorate for the confidence that they have placed in me by electing me to be their representative in this the 50th Parliament of Queensland. As this was the fourth time that I have stood for election, I feel a great deal of personal satisfaction in being able to retain the seat against all odds in the circumstances. I give my personal commitment to the people in my electorate that I will continue to represent them in this parliament to the very best of my ability.

As other honourable members have done in the past couple of days, I wish to thank the members of my campaign committee. I particularly thank Kevin O'Reilly, Pauline Young and Martin Klibbe. I also record my appreciation to Pat and Pauline Young and their two boys, Robert and Steven, for organising a thankyou barbecue at their home for all supporters and those who handed out my how-to-vote cards on the day of the election. Many people were not able to attend that barbecue because of the difficulty of distance and other commitments, but over 150 people turned up to the function. That was great.

I record my very special thanks and great admiration for the work done by my electorate secretary, Karen Farrell, who has been with me for the past seven years. All members of parliament, especially those who have been here for some time, will appreciate the great work that electorate secretaries do within our communities. They are not paid a great amount of money but they do a great deal of support work in our communities. Without the support and good sense of our electorate secretaries, I am sure that most members of this parliament would be less successful in achieving their goals.

Many did not survive the election, and that is unfortunate. There were good people in the 49th Parliament. Unfortunately, that is the nature of politics, but the wheel keeps turning. The make-up of this parliament is different to other parliaments and the next parliament will be different again. As I said, time rolls on. A little while ago I was speaking to John Mickel about the life of a politician in the parliament. In the early part of the century, it was not unusual for a politician to serve in this House for 20 or 30 years. I think the average time in parliament currently is somewhere less than two terms. I wonder what the record will show in a few years time. It is interesting to see that there are still members in this parliament who have served for a long period. On our side of the House, Vince Lester and Kev Lingard have represented their electorates for a long period.

Mike Horan, Vaughan Johnson and all of us in the National Party team have a big job ahead. We do not intend to be cowed by the defeat that we suffered at the election. We will work with our communities and those who have like-minded views as to where we should be going. We will move through our electorates and support those who are hurting and are in need. Small businesspeople, farmers and others are finding it very difficult.

I believe that rural and regional communities are basically all of those other than Brisbane, the Sunshine Coast, the Gold Coast, Townsville and Cairns. They are all suffering, and it is not just because of the GST, although that seems to be the favoured way of saying that our federal government has stuffed up badly. I believe that a lot of other issues such as globalisation, national competition policy, the loss of infrastructure and the loss of services in small communities are also to blame. Today another member spoke about the fact that children have to travel out of their towns to get a decent education or to get jobs. A small community can lose a whole generation in this way, and it is very difficult to encourage those young people to come back.

I would like to congratulate the Premier and, certainly, the Labor Party on their election victory. We need to recognise the fact that the Labor Party ran a very good campaign and, on a global basis, our campaign was pretty mediocre.

The electorate of Mirani stretches in the north from Farleigh, which is a suburb about five or 10 kilometres north of Mackay, south to The Caves, which is about 30 kilometres north of Rockhampton, and out to Moranbah, which is about 250 kilometres to the west. It is not a small electorate and it takes a bit of effort to get around it. It is a very diverse electorate. There is quite a lot of good rainforest country, coastal towns, urban areas, some fairly large grazing properties and, of course, the inland mining communities. It is also the home of the world's largest export coal terminal. Industries include sugar growing, cane growing, milling, refining, coalmining, cattle grazing, dairy farming, processing and fruit and vegetable production. There is quite a bit of secondary industry in the Mackay district and, of course, quite a substantial commerce industry as well.

The electorate of Mirani encompasses part or all of the shire councils of Sarina, Nebo, Mirani, Broomsound, Livingstone and, of course, the Mackay City Council. The electorate boundary redistribution resulted in Andergrove and Beaconsfield, which are suburbs of North Mackay, being moved into the Mackay electorate and the electorate of Mirani took on the areas of Planlands and East Mackay. I am very happy and pleased to be able to represent those two new areas.

Earlier I mentioned some of the problems facing rural communities. I believe that deregulation has had a fair bit to do with the winding back of and lack of services in some of our rural communities. That affects my constituents to a great extent because a lot of my electorate is made up of very small to fairly small communities. We should think back to the birth of the national competition policy. Those who have been around for a little while would remember that that was a dream of the Keating and Goss eras. We seem to have hung on to it for some reason or another. Unfortunately, the little clause that gives some credence to the public benefit test seems to have been overlooked. A lot of the deregulation that has occurred throughout Queensland, and probably throughout Australia, seems to have taken place without any consideration being given to the public benefit test. There is a huge opportunity for us to get some commonsense and sensibility back into the national competition policy by applying that test. If the dairy industry had been exposed to the public benefit test when it was deregulated, I am sure that some commonsense would have applied and different tracks may have been taken.

People feel disadvantaged. They feel disfranchised. As I said, I do not think that that happens only in rural communities. I think that it is happening across the state. People in our communities, whether they are in rural or city communities, want to see their towns prosper. They want to see progress. They want to see things go ahead. Most of all, they want some control over their futures. They want to know that they are a part of the big dream of making this country greater. Somehow or other, we have to include people in our dreams of making this place a better one. We need everybody behind us before we can start marching forward.

As a member of the SES for 25 years and a holder of a certificate, I would just like to record my appreciation, support and admiration for the volunteers in our community. This year is the International Year of the Volunteer. Right through every one of our communities and our electorates volunteers work tirelessly with no thought of pay, quite often costing them considerable amounts of money out of their own pocket, to make our communities better, whether it is through Meals on Wheels, support in hospital, the SES in the more structured form, our rural fire brigades or surf-lifesaving. The role of the volunteer in our community is mostly unsung and mostly unrecognised. At this time, I would like to record my very great appreciation of all those people who work in our community without thought of any sort of reward and, quite frequently, at great detriment and great expense to themselves.

The electorate of Mirani, as I said, is very diverse. The coal ports of Hay Point and Dalrymple Bay are supplied with coal from the coalmines in the hinterland. Obviously, getting the coal from the hinterland to Dalrymple Bay requires a fairly substantial double track rail line. There have been quite a

number of issues over a period of time such as lack of support and actually making sure the track is safe. Ongoing concerns have been expressed by the people who work on the rail track in terms of losing some of their most experienced work force. They are concerned that we are moving towards a contractual system in which those people who have been fettlers on the line for many years will lose their jobs to some sort of contractor.

Just recently, on 24 March, about 40 kilometres south of Sarina on the coal line a 120-wagon train taking coal from the Blair Athol mine to Dalrymple Bay derailed. More than 30 coal wagons came off the line. It actually occurred at 4.14 a.m. on the Waitara-Wandoo section of the line. It was pretty fortunate that nobody was injured, but it does highlight the priority of making sure the track is well maintained on a continuing basis.

These coal trains carry extreme quantities of coal. They travel at 80 kilometres per hour. They are something like three kilometres long and have five engines. The chances of coming off the track because of a lack of track maintenance is very high. Quite often these trains pass each other side by side. Any reduction in the work force on the maintenance of the track is of huge concern to all those drivers and those people taking part in bringing that coal to Hay Point. The public record in this parliament shows that I have spoken frequently on this issue.

There are two drivers on the train currently, but an option is being examined to look at driver-only operations so there would be only one driver on that train. I believe that has very serious workplace health and safety implications. I have been very vocal in making sure that that issue has been brought to the notice of the public.

Some members will recollect that there is a proposal before the Beattie government to lease out the Dalrymple Bay coal terminal. I understand that that is necessary to balance the budget and there is a need for cash. That is fine. However, I have some real concerns about leasing out a major piece of infrastructure. But there is another problem. The Dalrymple Bay coal terminal is currently being forced to pay local shire council rates and about \$500,000 in back rates is in dispute. I ask the government to make sure that the back rates are cleared and paid to the Sarina Shire Council before the terminal is leased out, because if that does not happen we are going to hear a lot about it.

The sugar industry in the Mirani electorate is one of the big income earners. I have spoken in this House many times about the difficult times that we have had in the sugar industry from 1998 when there was a huge amount of rain in August, which was unseasonal, to the 2000 season when the cane crop was affected by an orange rust, a rat plague and, on top of that, low prices. In fact, the rust in the variety Q124 is very severe. It has reached the stage where to try to clear the rust some farmers are actually spraying it with milk. Maybe there is a correlation between the dairy industry and the sugar industry here that we need to promote.

One of the things that is happening in the sugar industry right now is that CSR, an organisation that has been in the sugar industry in Queensland for 150 years, is in the current climate looking at divesting itself of its sugarmilling assets. This is a real opportunity for growers to buy back the farm. I would implore the Beattie government to look at supporting the growers who are trying to buy back the farm from CSR. It is a huge opportunity. It is a once in a generation opportunity—a once in a lifetime opportunity even—for the Queensland sugar farmers to gain ownership of the assets that rightly belong to them rather than seeing them go to a multinational company that is based offshore or whoever else might have the money to buy the assets off CSR. I would implore those in government to get behind the growers in the CSR mill areas to help them achieve their stated goals of acquiring the assets of CSR.

The cattle industry is a big issue in my electorate. It has been very tough over many years for the cattle industry and, fortunately, the prices in the saleyards now are the best they have been for many years. The Primary Industries Department—and certainly Customs—has to be very aware of the foot-and-mouth disease. If the foot-and-mouth disease entered Australia, we may as well wipe our cattle industry off the face of the Australia. There is no way that we could control it. It would be an absolute disaster. I also implore those people who are dealing with quarantine and restrictions in terms of imports into Australia to be very, very careful and to be very vigilant. If we lose the beef industry in Australia, it will be a disaster. Wild pigs and other feral animals would carry foot-and-mouth disease right across Australia. There is no way that we would ever be able to control it.

In conclusion, I would just like to thank the people of my electorate for re-electing me. I will do the best I possibly can to represent their best interests in this 50th Parliament.
