



Speech by

Mr M. HORAN

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

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VALEDICTORY

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (2.54 p.m.): Mr Speaker and parliamentary colleagues, it is a wonderful honour to be able to make another valedictory speech at the end of another hard year—another year in which both sides have worked incredibly hard towards doing the best we possibly can for Queensland.

When I spoke to the parliament last year we were somewhat overwhelmed by what had happened on September 11. We did not think we would see such atrocities again, yet sadly again this year what is in our minds more than anything else is the awful tragedy that happened at Bali. It affected so many people, particularly so many of our beloved Australians and young Australians.

One thing from this year that I will remember and I thank the Premier for is the trip we made together, on behalf of everybody here, to the memorial service in Canberra. If anything could inspire you to work hard, well and to the best of your ability as a member of parliament, it was that. Along with the Premier, I was pleased to bring the message back about that ceremony. I think I said in that speech that I will never forget sitting behind the families of the victims and seeing them stand as one and move up to light the candles. It struck me at the time that that was a part of our suburb, our town and our district. It really strengthens our desire to keep the democracy and peace we have here in Australia.

In the midst of the hurly-burly of this parliament—the hard times, the long times, the late nights and the tension that occurs in here—when we walk out of here we should always ask: have we made the world a better place; have we made Queensland a better place; have we made our suburb or district a better place; have we made our family life better? We should never forget this year and never forget the heroism and the values of Australia that we saw epitomised at the time of the attacks in Bali, after the attacks in Bali and when the patients came back to Australia. We acknowledge the wonderful support and help that has been given to them.

I thank my team—a team of 12 that fights well above its weight. Those 12 represent vast areas of this state and therefore have some very big travel commitments in order to get to and from here or to other parts of the state. Those 12 have a heavy workload of two or three shadow portfolios as well as various committee duties and so forth. They probably have as big a task as any members of opposition have ever had. They have addressed that task with great professionalism and courage.

As the Premier did, I will mention just a couple of things. I will definitely keep them in the vein of what a valedictory speech should be about. We feel proud that we have addressed some issues such as insurance, drought and water. We have addressed the issue of accountability, which I think is important for an opposition because at the end of the day we are the ones who put pressure on the government and ensure that policies are delivered and that finances are accounted for.

One of the important things we as an opposition have done this year is introduce a large number of good private members' bills. Subsequent to many of those bills being introduced, the relevant matter has been taken up by the government either in the government's own legislation or in following through on the ideas contained in the private members' bills. That has been very satisfying to us, because in opposition very often you are criticising or bringing the government to task over

something. We enjoyed doing something positive and we enjoyed getting some results out of it. We often observe amongst ourselves that in a lot of cases we win the debate but lose the vote. We look forward to the day when we can look up at the score board and see a different result. We are working towards that.

I feel very proud of the team and what we have worked towards. We have worked towards security of tenure and towards helping the sugar industry. We have addressed various issues to do with health, police and unemployment. There have been a number of problems for people in rural Queensland. That was epitomised by the way we went out and fought on behalf of Dirranbandi in relation to the Cubbie Station issue.

I particularly thank Mr Ray Hopper, who joined us at the end of last year after the valedictory speech. Ray has been a valued member of our team. I am sure he will be not only one of the characters of the parliament but also very effective.

We know that the member for Rockhampton shakes in his boots every time the member for Darling Downs stands up to ask a question. That is just an indication of how well Ray is going. I would also like to make a comment about our great friend Vince Lester, who announced during this year that at the end of this term, after nearly 30 years, he will not be seeking re-election. Vince has spent a long time representing seats such as Peak Downs and Keppel. He represented three seats altogether as a result of various redistributions. He was virtually unbeatable as a candidate because he works hard for his constituents. He has been a wonderful member of our team.

I mention Bali and the Bali memorial. It has made our world somewhat different and it has made this parliament somewhat different through a greater security presence, which is something that most of us in years gone by had not seen. It is a real warning for us to maintain not only good security but also to value that which is so precious to us—our peace in Australia.

This was the Year of the Outback and in the Year of the Outback we saw the scourge of one of the worst droughts that our state has ever seen. The drought is ongoing. There are very significant problems for people. Today, some of our team visited the Red Cross and heard some heart-rending stories about the problems that are occurring. Our hearts go out to those people. We must do everything that we can. It is a dreadful thing to go through a drought. I have had that experience once in my life when my children were small. It is ongoing. When there is no sign of it finishing, that is when it is terribly hard for those people, particularly those people who live in the outback areas.

Some great things have happened in sport in year. The Brisbane Lions—and the Premier hosted their function last night—won their second premiership in the AFL. That is historic. We had never even been in or won a premiership for some time. It was a great effort. Matthew Hayden scored a century at the Gabba against the Poms. In the Commonwealth Games this year, so many Queenslanders were able to obtain medals. To win that very first medal in speed skating at the Winter Olympics was also historic.

We also had the parliament in Townsville. I am pleased to say that, as we ran out of the Crocodiles dressing room into that parliament, the National Party put up a great performance. We worked in with the people of Townsville, we went to a number of functions and at the end of that parliament we admitted that it was an exercise well worth while. We gave credit where it was due. We were happy to participate and work to make it a success.

Towards the end of the year we have been ravaged by some disastrous bushfires around the state, which makes us realise what we face. All of us would like to thank all of those valiant Emergency Services workers—the Fire Service, the Ambulance Service, other emergency services and all of the volunteers and the police who have been helping in those bushfires. They do it throughout the state in many other emergencies, be they floods, accidents or cyclones. This is a time for us to reflect on what the thousands of Public Service workers do for our state. Whether they are in emergency services, the hospitals, the schools, helping families, building roads, providing good professional service across the counter, they all do good things for Queensland. They are a part of the law that we pass in this parliament and the service that is managed and organised by this parliament. I give to those people a big thankyou from all of us in this parliament, but particularly I want to give that thankyou personally on behalf of my team.

We also saw CHOGM held in Queensland. It was a great honour to have the Queen, the Prime Minister of Great Britain and all the other Commonwealth leaders in our state. The people of the Sunshine Coast and those who did the organising behind the scenes for CHOGM did a wonderful job.

I would like to thank some people sincerely for the help that they have given the National Party team, the opposition and this parliament. First of all, I would like to thank my electorate office staff. They have done a wonderful job. Kevena, who worked for me when I ran the Toowoomba showgrounds, works for me in my electorate office. She has had a difficult week this week. Her daughter underwent an operation in Cairns and she had to go up there. I would like to thank her and my other staff sincerely for what they do. I would like to thank my chief of staff, Roger Harcourt; my

senior media adviser, James Baker; my personal assistant, Jo; and all the other staff in our opposition office. We have a lot of very talented young staff who have done a great job and built up their experience. They have been a wonderful assistance to us. I would also like to particularly thank my driver, Mike Fenwick.

On behalf of the National Party, I want to thank everybody who contributes to this parliament and the way in which it operates—the security staff; the library staff; the catering staff—and I should remember Maureen who retires at the end of this year after 17 years of service. I thank the housekeeping staff; the attendants; the bills and papers office in particular for the wonderful service that we receive from them; the gardeners; the IT staff; travel; administration; and all the corporate staff. I would also like to thank particularly the ministerial services bureau in the Premier's department who assist us in running the opposition.

Mr Speaker, I would also like to thank you. You have a difficult task and I think in this entire term of parliament—two years of it has now gone by—there has been only one dissent motion and I think that we entered into that in the correct spirit. Mr Speaker, I want to thank you and all your staff for the friendly assistance that is provided to us during the year.

I particularly want to thank my whips, Vince Lester and Lawrence Springborg, and Kev Lingard the opposition leader of the House. We all remember last week when, in one little tactic, we felt that Kev beat Terry Mackenroth—not an easy task—Anna Bligh and the former speaker. Everybody was running around. We really gave Kev a pat on the back for that wonderful moment. It was one of the best moments in parliament. We remember it fondly.

Finally, I would like to thank the media. The Premier also mentioned the media. Often times when we look at the press reports and we see that the opposition gets a little paragraph at the end, we wish that we could switch it around. But we believe that the media has given us a good, fair go this year and that is all that we ask. We make our own luck. I would like to thank the media for the support and assistance that they have given us and for the way in which they have covered this parliament.

Like the Premier, I would like to wish everybody in Queensland a very happy Christmas and an enjoyable new year with their families. Certainly, like the Premier, I hope that it can be a wet Christmas and that all of those potential dams that the National Party would have built could be filled. It would be lovely to have some of that water now.

On a very genuine note, I want to particularly thank my wife, Helen. For all of us in parliament, a lot of time is spent away from home. I have to do a four-hour round trip, so I spend much of my time down here or elsewhere. Other members have to make longer trips. Helen is at home keeping things going—feeding the horses and the dogs and everything else—and often comes down here at the end of the week to attend functions.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr HORAN: No, I do not have a Rusty; I have Boston and Sally. I really want to thank Helen for all her support. Sometimes when we get home, it is our first night home in seven nights. The other night Helen said, 'You have not been home for seven nights and as soon as you get home, you are on the telephone.' That is the nature of this job. So I want to thank Helen. I thank also my children. We do not see much of them. Matt and his wife are in Sydney, Tim is in his last year of a three-year contract in London—and we look forward to them coming home with the grand kids—and our daughter, Emma, is over in England. Her husband, as a flier in the Navy, had to go to Afghanistan to take part in that theatre. We miss her. It is nice to speak to her on the phone every now and again.

I thank all members of parliament and their families for their contribution. I know that we all have similar issues with our families as they stand behind us with their love, support, patience and understanding of what is involved in this job. That inspires us all to keep going and to give 100 per cent to this parliament and to the people we represent. Finally, I thank my deputy, Vaughan, for his wonderful loyalty and support and for the way in which he looks after such a typically large Queensland electorate. Happy Christmas to everybody here. I hope you all have a wonderful time. I look forward to seeing you all next year.