



Speech by

JEFF SEENEY

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

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ARTS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (5.37 p.m.): I am pleased to be able to make a contribution to this debate this afternoon on the Arts Legislation Amendment Bill and to, in common with the member for Kallangur, make some comment about the significance and the importance of arts in my electorate and the great role that it plays in the lives of many of my constituents.

I would like to initially mention the RADF scheme, the Regional Arts Development Fund scheme, that provides some funding to local organisations and is distributed through the local shire councils. I indicate to members the great success that that scheme has been to small communities that I represent. The one community that stands out more than any other when we talk about RADF is the town of Monto, and the minister will certainly reinforce that. There is a very active RADF group in Monto that has been able to access some of the RADF funds and have made a significant difference to their communities. The minister was able to come up to Monto not so long ago to officially open some murals that the group had been able to fund through the RADF scheme.

I am sure the minister is also aware that there is another official opening planned for a sculpture that has been funded through the RADF to commemorate the first doctor who practised in that community, who coincidentally was a woman back in 1923. A young lady came to that small community as a doctor and would have been one of the first woman doctors in Queensland. All members can imagine some of the hair-raising experiences she would have faced in what was then a new settlement. The local arts group in Monto have put together an RADF grant to build a sculpture in the newly completed gardens to mark the significant part that she played in that community. That is to be officially opened—and I think the Premier has been invited to open it. Whether or not he will be able to fit that into his schedule remains to be seen, but I am sure the minister will receive an invitation to that as well.

The RADF plays a great part in all of those small communities. The councils make a contribution as well. They play a role in getting those projects up and running and in providing not just the physical projects like murals and sculptures but also workshops, training and access to a skills improvement process across a wide range in the field of the arts. I would certainly urge every member of this parliament to support that program in their communities and certainly the minister and the members of the cabinet to support that program when it comes time for the hard decisions to be made in the preparation of budgets. It is an important program and it contributes a heck of a lot for a relatively small amount of money. It contributes a heck of a lot to the lifestyle of people right across Queensland and certainly in my electorate.

The member for Kallangur spoke at length about the importance that the field of arts played in his electorate, and so it does in my electorate, even though it is a vastly different electorate. It is an electorate that is made up of some 14 different small communities and in each of those communities there are groups of people who come together to put on art shows and practise arts of various sorts. As recently as last weekend, I was privileged to be able to attend the opening of the Brigalow Arts Festival in Biloela. That arts festival is held every year and it is put on by a group of volunteers headed by a great lady called Mrs Dorothy Rideout, who does a great job. They put on an arts show every year that is really worth going to and is a great credit to everyone who is involved. That festival is being held this week. I am pleased to be one of the sponsors of that art show and I went to the sponsors' evening last Sunday night. That festival is certainly going from strength to strength.

Right throughout the communities that I represent that type of enjoyment of the arts is typical. In Gin Gin in the Kolan shire, a fine arts group put on an annual art show that draws exhibitors from all over the state. I know that most people go through Gin Gin while travelling along the Bruce Highway on their trip north and do not realise the extent to which arts and culture is very much a part of that small community. That group has been able to access funds, through a long and tortuous process, to gain access to the old courthouse building that is located in the main street of Gin Gin. They are turning that into a permanent art gallery. It is a great old building. It is typical of the old courthouses with the old Queenslander style of architecture of wide verandas and big spaces inside. It will be a great display centre for the fine art that is a feature of that community.

Further south in Wondai, similarly another group has purchased the old railway station at Wondai and turned that into an art gallery. The Wondai Art Gallery is becoming particularly well known throughout that south Burnett region for the shows that it puts on. It has received some good support from the local council and it is able to put on a different display on a regular basis. It has been particularly successful in that and it is establishing quite a reputation. This year Wondai is celebrating its 100th year and a special effort is being made by that gallery to reflect that 100 years of history in that small community. Once again, a group of volunteers—a group of people for whom the whole area of art, the appreciation of art and the practice of art is important—have given their own time and have come together to make use of a facility in their community that was no longer needed for the purpose that it was built. Yet it has been able to play a very important role in the lifestyle of that community. I certainly congratulate all of those people who have been involved in those projects in all of the communities right throughout rural and regional Queensland.

Another area that I want to mention is the Arts Council productions that travel throughout rural and regional Queensland. Those members who represent Brisbane electorates, and the people whom they represent, are very lucky in that they can go across the river to the fine facilities that are available there and enjoy the theatre productions or, indeed, enjoy productions of all sorts right throughout the city, whether they be the big theatre companies or the smaller theatre companies that operate in different parts of the city. When you live in a small, rural or regional community, it is very difficult to get the opportunity to enjoy those types of productions. The Arts Council subsidises, or assists, those communities to bring theatre productions or cultural events of all sorts on a regular basis to those areas so that people who live in those areas get the opportunity to enjoy them. Actually, my wife is a member of the local Arts Council in my town. When she joined, I used to get dragged along to these productions. Now I am a fan. I admit to being a convert.

Mr Matt Foley: There is hope for us all.

Mr SEENEY: As the minister indicates, there is hope for us all. I have certainly become a fan of the Arts Council and the productions that have come to my small community. Over the years, there have been a wide range of productions—from classical music, to theatre, to different types of musical productions and plays. It is really a great program that allows those types of productions to tour rural and regional Queensland. Sometimes they play to fairly small crowds, but they are always very appreciative crowds. I hope, too, that that program will always continue and will always be able to access the necessary funds to allow it to continue.

The other part of this bill that I would like to comment on relates to libraries. The member for Kallangur spoke at length about the importance of libraries in his community. Libraries are also important in the communities that I represent. I think that the information age has probably increased the importance and the usage of libraries in our communities. I think that the importance of having those library facilities in small communities needs to be appreciated. I know that some councils throughout the area that I represent have made a major effort to make available a wider range of material that is available through their libraries to the people who live in those communities. That has certainly made those communities a better place in which to live. In Monto again, the council has expanded an old bank building and more than doubled the size of the library. It has made it a much better facility that could make available a wide range of opportunities for people. As the member for Kallangur pointed out, libraries no longer offer just books: they offer a wide range of audiovisual items such as CDs and tapes that people can borrow.

Libraries have also become access points for the Internet. Most libraries in my electorate now have a number of computers available for people to access the Internet—to access that world beyond the small community in which they live. That has allowed a very great number of people to put their toe in the water, if you like. They start to access the Internet and all that it offers through the public library and then go on to probably buy their own computers and become part of that information age. The access they have been able to get through the public library system has certainly allowed them to develop those skills and not be left behind in the information age with the Internet and all that it offers to people in remote areas. That has been particularly valuable.

It is easy to imagine how people can get left behind and feel more and more isolated. I think the Internet and the information opportunities it offers are probably more important to people who live in

remote, rural and regional areas than they are in some of the big city areas. The level of usage in some of the communities I represent would amaze the casual observer. The Internet is something people who have been isolated by distance can use to overcome that isolation. They can be part of online communities and online interest groups. It certainly has made life in those communities a lot better.

I mentioned the library in Monto. Another initiative I have seen put to great use is one that has been conducted by the Banana shire in Biloela. For many years it has operated a travelling library. There are a number of small communities within the shire. The library has a truck that looks, for all intents and purposes, like a furniture removal van. The staff take a selection of the things that are available in the library and load it all into the travelling library truck. It does a circuit around four or five different communities in the Banana shire. That allows people in those outlying communities to access the facilities of the library that otherwise they would have to travel into Biloela to access. That is a great initiative that needs to be encouraged and recognised. Those people who supported that and put that in place certainly deserve congratulations.

The member for Kallangur mentioned the toy library that is part of the library in Narangba. One of the best toy libraries I have ever seen exists in the library in Biloela—or at least it did exist in the library in Biloela. It became too big for the library in Biloela because of its popularity and because of the patronage it was enjoying from the people in that area. The collection actually became too big. We had to try to find alternative accommodation for it. It was part of a project that became known as the Biloela resource centre.

A group of very capable ladies in the Biloela community set out on the task of raising almost \$800,000. It was a monumental task. When that project started it seemed like the financial equivalent of climbing Mount Everest. But they had a vision—a concept—of a centre that would be available to families of all types but especially families with children with special needs. They could use the resources of the centre, which would be a safe space where those children with special needs could come together and access not just treatment and therapy but also things such as the toy library and other facilities that would be of benefit to them and assist in developing them as individuals.

I was very pleased to be part of the official opening when John Anderson came to Biloela to officially open the Biloela resource centre earlier this year. It was a great day. Most people realised that they were seeing the impossible become reality. They were seeing the official opening of an \$800,000 centre in a place like Biloela. It was something that just about everybody believed was impossible. Yet that group of mothers who wanted to improve the opportunities that were available to their children were successful in doing that. They put the finance together and they established the Biloela resource centre. Now it is the home of that great collection of toys and other things that were formerly housed at the Biloela library.

The arts is an area that I think is too often underrated in the contribution it makes to all our lifestyles, wherever we live. Wherever we live, the contribution it makes to our lifestyle is different. It is particularly important that we realise that, wherever people live across Queensland, the arts and all that it offers can make a great contribution to the lifestyles of people in rural and remote communities.

I commend the minister with all sincerity for the genuine approach that he takes to the Arts portfolio in this parliament. I hope that whoever has the Arts portfolio in the future can continue to put forward the interests of the arts community with the passion that this minister does. That flows through to greater benefits for all of those people, my constituents included, who benefit from the arts in Queensland. I commend the bill to the House.