



Speech by

Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard Wednesday, 19 May 2004

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (2.44 p.m.): It is with pleasure that I rise to speak in the address-in-reply debate. Like other members who are celebrating being back in the parliamentary system, it is a joy and an honour to be able to represent the electorate of Maroochydore, first and foremost. When I meet with school students it is always interesting to explain to them the role of a member of parliament. I explain to them that we have a role as a local member representing the constituency, we have a role within our political party and we have a role within the parliament—that is, most importantly, to represent all the people of Queensland as well as our individual constituency. When we deliberate and pursue issues we need to consider the broad impact upon the state of Queensland.

Local constituency work is something that does not always get a lot of kudos from traditional media outlets. Local outlets follow local issues. It is the bedrock of the work we do. It is contact with our local people that informs us of the issues that are important to them. It is contact with our local people that keeps us grounded in terms of how they see us performing that role.

In this rapidly changing world and with new technology the challenge of keeping in contact with the constituency only grows. When we look back in history we find that people would sometimes have been away from their electorates for months. They came from all over Queensland as we do to represent individual electorates. With modern transport things have changed. Yet we have the challenges of technology which, in many ways, has increased the amount of work that we are able to put through our offices and deal with.

The life of a modern member of parliament is challenging. It is one that impacts upon our families, our personal life and our professional life in interesting ways. But we volunteered for this job; we put our hands up. All members, regardless of our political leanings, are usually motivated by the belief that being involved in our democratic processes is a vitally important part of our future. If we believe in something we should be willing to get in and work for it. We are the unusual ones because we represent the 89 seats and are at the front line. It is a democratic right which we should always uphold.

I am blessed to live where I do. I have a constituency that stretches from Mount Coolum, Point Arkwright and Yaroomba down to Mooloolaba. This comprises some wonderful tourism spots that are well known to members of this parliament. It has been growing rapidly but also provides very interesting and diverse dining and accommodation experiences for people. It is a very exciting area.

I have the challenges of growth, like many living in the south-east corner. This is the challenge we face. The popularity of the areas we represent challenges the quality of life that we also want to see protected. I believe one of the biggest challenges we face in Queensland, and particularly in the south-east, is maintaining and protecting and hopefully enhancing the quality of life in a range of areas for our constituents and for the future constituents who will live in these areas well beyond the time when we represent our electorates. It is a challenge getting the planning right. We face the challenges of delivering the infrastructure that deals not only with transport needs but also with environmental needs.

In the election campaign the pertinent issues were transport and our hospital system. I gave a commitment that I would continue to fight for significant upgrades of our road system. Since 1998 we have

been promised a road study to be completed and then out of that construction of a new road network north of the Maroochy River. What is a disgrace is that the planning study was stretched out in the most painful of ways and still has not been released publicly. But five days out from the election, Terry Mackenroth announced that \$35 million would be spent on the Pacific Paradise network and the upgraded interchanges would be built. I welcomed that announcement because I gave a commitment on behalf of the coalition that a National-Liberal coalition would proceed with that bypass and motorway upgrade, but also that we would see the duplication of the Sunshine Motorway bridge.

This is essential infrastructure not only for quality of life but also for the environment. We hear members talk about gridlock and freeways that grind to a halt. We have that already on the Sunshine Coast, and it is not with great pleasure that I report that to this House. That is also impacting on our tourists and our visitors who bring the dollars that sustain the jobs in our local economy. However, there is gridlock more than twice a day. We do not have rush hour two times a day. Rather, we have gridlock many times a day on the Sunshine Motorway over the Maroochy River bridge and to the north of the Pacific Paradise area.

The Maroochy River bridge on the Sunshine Motorway carries about 32,000 vehicles a day. Those members who understand road issues know that we need to start four-laning a road when around about 22,000 vehicles a day use it. That road is already 10,000 cars a day over the design capacity. There is nothing, however, in the road implementation plan or any of the announcements of government for funding the duplication of that bridge. This issue is impacting on the Sunshine Coast from Noosa through my electorate of Maroochydore and also Kawana, because it is a key coastal highway that links those areas. It impacts on constituents in a number of electorates.

I call on the Beattie government to put this road item on its agenda in the next two years, because the area is already facing five per cent to eight per cent annual growth rates of traffic and that road is 10,000 vehicles a day over and above what it is designed to carry. It is unacceptable that it is not in the road funding plan. Our commitment was that in government we would fund that. I call on this government which won the February election to match that commitment and to follow through, because it is impacting on those communities.

While I welcome the upgrades to the Sunshine Motorway to the south which have been long announced and reannounced, without the upgrading of the bridge there will still be gridlock. I also welcome the \$35 million to be spent to the north of the bridge. However, it is interesting to note that, when Terry Mackenroth was asked about this pledge he made five days out from the election, he was asked whether the road would go ahead regardless of whether I was elected as a National Party member or the Labor Party won with its candidate. He gave a commitment that, regardless of who the candidate was, this would happen; it was a commitment of government. We are always a bit suspicious when we get a \$35 million announcement five days out from an election when all the other road funding had already been announced, but he also gave a commitment that the work would start next year. But the detail after the election is that there is more planning to be done. That will start next year, but the road construction will not be completed until 2008.

Unfortunately, this is a pattern that we see across south-east Queensland and Queensland generally with the Beattie government—big on PR, big on the planning documentation but it strings it out for years. Projects go well past the desirable starting date to the point where communities get frustrated with a consultation process that is then so far removed from the starting process of the actual construction. There needs to be good planning and there needs to be good consultation, but the government does not need six years to do a planning study. That is just an example of the ridiculous situation we are faced with on the north shore and the Sunshine Motorway.

There are other critical roads that need to be upgraded as well, and Maroochy Road is certainly one of those. As a key link to Nambour, where the base hospital is located, it is also groaning under gridlock many times a day. Once again, the funding to complete the links—not just take the next step with about two kilometres of road upgrades—is not programmed in the immediate future. These are the challenges that we need to see this government deliver on. If Queensland is going to deal with quality of lifestyle issues, infrastructure and bringing the infrastructure spend up to speed, these issues have to be addressed.

When one looks at the amount of funding that is being spent on infrastructure in Queensland as a percentage of gross domestic product, one realises that we are really off the boil. New South Wales is whipping Queensland with regard to the percentage of its gross domestic product on a state basis it is spending on infrastructure. Queensland is so far behind the Australian average that it is just not funny. We have seen a situation where there has been a fall-off in the amount of money spent on roads to only about 14 per cent of the capital works budget from where it was sitting at around about 25 per cent a few years ago. In real terms, road funding is going backwards under the Beattie government. Is it any wonder there is gridlock? The government cannot keep passing the buck. It needs to address this issue, because it is a lifestyle and amenity issue. It is an economic impact issue, but it is also an environmental issue. If the

roads are gridlocked, public transport does not work. If the roads are gridlocked, cars are spewing out greenhouse gases into the environment and the impact is horrendous.

Let me address another key issue in the election for my constituents, and that is our health system. This is something that I feel passionately about. We do need an effective public hospital system that is operating in our community. There are some excellent staff who do a wonderful job and who dedicate themselves beyond the call of duty to deliver that. But people also have a breaking point. I have talked to so many good people—nurses, doctors and specialists—who have sacrificed financial gain to work in the public system. Quite frankly, it is about time that the issues of dealing with staff and listening to their concerns and not shooting the messenger were taken on board.

However, excellent staff have left the system broken hearted because they find that there is not a good cooperative culture within Queensland Health bureaucracy. There is a tendency that, when people raise issues to seek a solution, they are shot down and even bullied out of the system. We now have a situation where there are only half the number of anaesthetists to do the work that is necessary on the Sunshine Coast in the public system. The state government announced during the election campaign that there would be extra operations and that it would open up this theatre and that. We know that currently the full theatres are not operating already at Nambour Hospital. While it sounded good in theory, until this government addresses the fact that it has had specialists only recently walk out of the system because of a lack of support, we will continue to have a situation where specialists who deliver a particular service sometimes have a lot of down time because the full range of services is not in place for them to deliver that particular service. It is terribly inefficient.

I have constituents who have waited five or six years for an eye operation. I raised it with the minister, and he blamed all of those industrialised doctors walking out of the system. But this is the same complaint I raised with his predecessor before the indemnity dispute hit the fan, yet the government is still not listening. When will it listen? There are specific issues where it needs to cooperate, because that is the way forward. The government has to cooperate and work with its staff in order to solve these problems. Do not bully them. Do not threaten them and certainly do not shoot the messenger when they speak out in terms of ways to solve the issues. It needs to work with them. I have been disappointed that the current minister has made the mistake of following his departmental line. I have talked to many excellent people who have left the system because of the way they have been bullied out of Queensland Health.

Cancer treatment is something that I am very keen to see advanced. An issue I have been raising for the last few years is that there was a private provider coming on line. There were up to 12- to 15-week waits at one time in the public system, and certainly there are still many months of waits for critical radiation treatment for cancer patients. There was the opportunity to send some of that work to private providers so people could get timely treatment to ensure that they were in the best position to fight this insidious disease. We announced that we would go ahead and purchase services from the private provider on the Sunshine Coast so that those hundreds of patients did not have to travel to Brisbane. During the campaign the state Labor government matched our commitment, and I welcome that. I am keen to see that come into place soon. I will be watching it, because we are keen to see it happen sooner rather than later. With regard to travelling back and forth to Brisbane when one needs multiple treatments for cancer and the additional stress on families, you have to know people to understand the impact.

There are other issues that I want to talk about with regard to the local environment, particularly our river system. By the year 2015 it is estimated that there will be a doubling of the number of boats on our waterways. We love our outdoors lifestyle and it is wonderful, but the resources to cope with that have not actually been flowing. I am concerned about issues to do with pump-out, water quality issues with boats in our system, the policing of the regulations to maintain good order and environmental guidelines being put in place.

I certainly call on the government to make it a priority to protect our waterways and to look at the issues of good boating practices and water quality. The Mooloolah River and the Maroochy River are too important to watch them degenerate. We need to do all that we can to ensure that not only is their future health addressed but also that there is safety on our waterways in terms of how we look after our boats.

Mooloolaba has a commercial port and a lot of people do not realise that it has one of the biggest turnovers in seafood on the east coast. About \$80 million worth of seafood goes through the Mooloolaba harbour. I am sure that people have enjoyed the seafood on the Sunshine Coast. One of the reasons why I fought so hard for the dredging of the Mooloolaba harbour entrance was that it was having an impact not only upon recreational users but also on the commercial industries that operate out of the Mooloolaba harbour. Experienced pilots and experienced skippers were saying that the harbour was dangerous. It took months to get action from the government. They said that nature would fix it and to wait until there was more rain. Incidentally, when there was more rain the problem got worse. Finally, I was pleased that we moved the hands of government, and the harbour was dredged. Subsequently it has had to be dredged a few more times, but so it should be. We do not expect to have a road block and not clear it. The same thing happens with a port that is critical to the economy of the area. The government has a legislated responsibility to keep that port operational and to keep the harbour entrance safe. So I urge the

government to never let the dredging of that harbour go for so long in future. Unnecessary loss and damage to vessels was caused and compounded because of that situation. It was just an outrageous situation. Anyone who had seen the harbour and knew that Mooloolaba port used to be one of the safest ports in Queensland knew that Queensland Transport and the government had acted too slow to fix it. I will certainly be continuing to follow that issue.

The schools in my area are keen to see the upgrades set down under the school renewal program. Also on the agenda is the time frame for the upgrade of some of those buildings. I will certainly be following that matter as there have been commitments given by the government.

As my time is limited today, I want to particularly pay respect and honour to the people in my life who have supported me. I particularly want to thank my family and my mum and dad who have been such a wonderful support to me personally and in my campaign. They were just wonderful. I have a campaign team of so many volunteers. I cannot do this job without the many unpaid volunteers who have a belief in my vision for Queensland, who have a belief in their local area and who work with me. They are not necessarily driven by personal political ambition, but they share that belief in upholding our democratic system and looking after our local area. I really appreciate the hundreds of volunteers who helped me throughout my campaign, which made it possible for me to sit in this place for my fifth term in parliament.

My staff have also just been outstanding. I acknowledge Betty Ledger and the work that she has done, and Merril Rough. I also want to acknowledge Trish Longhurst who, tragically, I heard today, has just passed away. Trish worked for Neil Turner also as an electorate officer. Although she had not worked for me in recent times, she had worked for me as well. My sympathy goes out to Mike and their family, because Trish was a caring, compassionate person who did the job of electorate officer in not only my office at times but also in Neil Turner's office. Electorate officers are wonderful people who, when they have the right advice and a compassionate ear with which to listen, make such a difference as to how we do our work.

I value my staff. I value those who work voluntarily with me, because the job of a member of parliament is not a job that you do alone. Not one person can do this job without the help of many other people, be they the paid staff who are dedicated beyond the call of duty or those volunteers who give their heart and their time.