



Speech by  
**Mike Horan**

**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH**

Hansard Wednesday, 19 May 2004

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**ADDRESS-IN-REPLY**

**Mr HORAN** (Toowoomba South—NPA) (3.20 p.m.): I look forward to participating in this address-in-reply debate to the speech by the Governor at the opening of the parliament. It seems a fair while ago now that we opened the parliament. I look forward to this, my sixth term. Like the member for Stafford, yesterday was my 13th anniversary in this place. He and I came to parliament in two by-elections that were held in 1991. I well remember that period of time. I joined the National Party, had one week of preselection, four weeks of campaigning and got into parliament. I had a steep learning curve. History shows that I missed the first division. It was about two minutes after I was sworn in, and I had been led outside to have a photo taken. I heard these bells and there was a riot at the front gates at the time. Some members who were here in 1991 may remember it. I thought the bells were some sort of security alarm and we were battering down the hatches to keep the rioters out. Anyway, I know a little bit more about it now.

I look forward during this term to being able to represent my very loyal constituents in Toowoomba South to the very best of my ability. I feel grateful that through that period of time I have developed some experience and have been able to help them in many cases, particularly in individual cases when I can use the experience and knowledge of my city and of the important people in the city to help people with the minimum of fuss. I think all of us in our electorates enjoy that. Sometimes it can be frustrating. The big projects do not always come to fruition. But to be able to help someone on an individual basis is really worth while.

At the outset, I want to thank sincerely my campaign committee and the Toowoomba South electorate council. They did a marvellous job. The campaign was well funded, well run and well organised. We were ready and prepared. We got an increased margin. This election campaign we had far more helpers than we have ever had before. We always have had plenty of helpers, but we had more people than we needed on the booths. So it was very helpful to those who were organising the rostering.

I have a couple of comments I would like to make about the election campaign. In Toowoomba the campaign has always been run on a peaceful basis at all the booths. Each party—sometimes there are two parties, sometimes there are three or four parties—takes enough space for three or four corflutes at each gate. This time we noticed a real change, with the Labor Party swamping entire fences around some of the schools. It certainly did not lead to a very peaceful attitude at the start. I think all political parties are entitled to a fair crack of the whip in getting a reasonable space near the front gate for two or three of their posters, and we will certainly make sure that happens in the future.

Also, some helpers who had campaign material on their clothing went into polling booths and lingered in those polling booths. It is against the rules and it should not happen. If those things start to creep in and people push the envelope, then the next thing we will have is unpleasantness at polling booths which we certainly do not want to see in Toowoomba. We have never had it before.

I would like to not only thank sincerely my campaign committee but also congratulate fellow state members of parliament in my area: Stuart Copeland, the member for Cunningham, who had an increased majority; Kerry Shine, the member for Toowoomba North, who got an increased majority; and, in particular, Ray Hopper, the member for Darling Downs, who won with a very substantial result.

Ray took a courageous decision some two years ago after he had spent a year in parliament as an Independent. He came to the conclusion that he could do more for the people of his electorate if he was part of a team—part of a team that had statewide policy, part of a team that was working for major issues for people not only in his electorate but also throughout the state. He also saw that, unless there was some degree of unity and pulling together on the side of conservative politics, Labor could well be in power for decades. So he took a very brave decision along with his wife, Jo Anne. I know he had some very unpleasant and disturbing experiences along the way, but he has been rewarded for his courageous decision and for the manner in which he works his electorate in such an understanding and hardworking way with a very good result. I know he will work very hard to maintain the confidence of his electorate.

At the outset I would like to pledge to the members of my electorate continuing hard work not only on the individual matters that are important to people in my electorate but also on the major issues that are important to the people of Toowoomba and the Darling Downs. Very often the economy of the Darling Downs and south-west Queensland provides so much of the economic impetus for our city, for our boarding schools, for our universities, for our rural and agricultural suppliers and for all our service industries, be they legal and accountancy practices, computer services, retail and so forth.

I want to mention today an issue which I have probably spoken about more than anyone else in this parliament, and that is the issue of recycled water from Brisbane to the Lockyer Valley and Toowoomba. During the election campaign and late last year the Labor government said that it would not proceed with the project; that it was not economically viable. During the election campaign we were able to force the Premier to say that he would review that project. I understand from the material tabled in the parliament today that the Premier intends to undertake a review of the project.

I want to say again that the people behind this project are not the sort of people who would persist for the years that they have persisted with a project like this if it was pie in the sky, if it was fanciful, if it had no practical and successful future. They are people who have been successful in their own professions and businesses. They are people who have borrowed substantial amounts of money at great risk, who have developed export markets, who employ many people—in some cases over 100 people—and who have made a real success of projects and have contributed to the success of the downs and Toowoomba.

These people would not continue with this project with the persistence they have if they did not believe in it and had not already committed so much of their funds to it. So I urge the Premier to review this carefully and have great confidence in the people who are behind this project and the people who believe in it. I was very disappointed to hear—and I have heard a couple of ministers say it—people say that the project would not proceed because of its economic unviability, the phrase that this would benefit about 100 farmers and it would be a subsidy of about \$1 million per farmer. That is an incorrect attitude to have.

If recycled water comes up, there will be primary producers who will benefit from having security of supply of water, but they turn that into increased and secure production based on secure, long-term contracts. In turn, that means 90 to 95 per cent of the funds they derive from that—maybe even more at times—gets spent on new equipment, on staff, on export and on developing value adding because the water is far more expensive than any other water they have used before. So they grow higher value crops and they value add those particular crops and develop export and new domestic markets. So it simply flows through the community and everybody benefits.

It has been estimated that immediately this water arrived at the Darling Downs there would be somewhere in the order of a \$150 million increase in farm gate sales. If we extrapolate that on a two-for-one or three-to-one formula, that means a \$300 million to \$450 million economic boost to Toowoomba and the Darling Downs. For us on the downs, where our greatest asset is the magnificent black soil and the best farming systems and farmers in the world in terms of the tonnage they produce from that black soil, add the security of supply of that water in a climate where we are short of rainfall and for us it is like opening up a massive coalmine, it is like opening up a port facility, it is like having a brand new aluminium smelter or some other major project put into the area in terms of what it would do for our district.

We are not on the coast where we can have \$30 million esplanades built and attract more tourists. We are not on the coast where we can have an \$800 million eight-lane highway built to bring more economic growth, tourists and business to our area. But we are in the best agricultural area of the world. We are just a little bit light on when it comes to rainfall, and that secure water supply would do so much for the economic development of our beautiful city which sits at the edge of that massive growth area of south-east Queensland. That would flow on to the capital city, to the port of Brisbane, to rail, transport and the like, and I think it is a project that is visionary and it is a project that must proceed.

Some of the detail of what has been happening with that project is that there was an independent study undertaken. That independent study did show that it was environmentally viable and would have wonderful environmental results for Moreton Bay, the Brisbane River and, at the other end, the Condamine-Balonne system. It is technically viable and it does provide economic benefits. But that independent report said that it is not yet financially viable and it made some recommendations on how to make it more viable. That is being undertaken through Ernst and Young at the moment. They are looking at

a revised system of purchasing water from councils at a cost of around about \$450 million involving the Brisbane City Council, the Ipswich City Council and possibly other councils in south-east Queensland. At the same time it saves those councils undertaking massive capital upgrades that they are required to do under the COAG agreements on the current outfalls and pumpouts that they undertake and, instead, taking that valuable water, purchasing it at the correct economic price to both sides, and forming a board that will transport that water with some federal and state government help, with major input from the farmers themselves and from private enterprise to construct that line and the pump station.

Bear in mind that Toowoomba now pumps its 8,000 megalitres of water over 400 metres in a vertical lift from the Crestbrook Dam to the top of the range and then along to Toowoomba and this lift, whilst it will be slightly higher, will be lowered somewhat when the second range crossing is built and the water is able to be taken through the tunnel for the second range crossing. That brings me to the second range crossing and other major projects which, along with the recycled water, are a real window of opportunity for Toowoomba, the Darling Downs, south-east Queensland and south-west Queensland.

The Warrego Highway through Toowoomba is the heaviest freight carrying road in Australia. Go to any of the intersections of James Street through Toowoomba at any time and you will see six or eight B-doubles at either side of the lights. There are 16 sets of traffic lights that these trucks have to traverse as they go through our city. It is the main highway from the booming growth area of south-east Queensland and the port of Brisbane through Toowoomba to both Darwin and Melbourne and, in some cases, Sydney. As I said, it is the heaviest freight carrying road in Australia, and I doubt that any city in Australia the size of Toowoomba would have such a highway going right through the absolute centre of it with four lanes at times almost chock-a-block with B-doubles.

For the social infrastructure of our city and the way that people traverse our city, that main east-west route is at all times full of huge semitrailers and B-doubles and it is a major traffic issue in our city. Just as the recycled water would be a nation-building, Snowy Mountains type exercise for our state, the second range crossing will help to build this nation, because these trucks—with the major input they have to the transport of goods in Australia—would be able to traverse the range at about 80 kilometres an hour on a lower gradient and they would save at least a half to three-quarters of an hour in time and fuel. It would enable the western side of Toowoomba to become the Singapore of Australia, as the Australian inland railway is developed and as the second range crossing becomes a major truck route to enable transport and logistics terminals to be established at Charlton by the Department of State Development and by private enterprise at Wellcamp Downs. It would certainly be a great boost, not only to us but also to south-east Queensland in terms of transport logistics, be it road, rail or containers coming from the end of the line of the Australian inland railway and being distributed throughout south-east Queensland.

During the election campaign I spoke a lot about the Toowoomba Base Hospital and in particular the need for radiation therapy. It is one of the things that I want to continue to fight for. The federal government has promised a major contribution towards getting radiation therapy equipment for Toowoomba. Whether it is the Toowoomba Hospital as a public hospital or a private hospital that puts it in place, it is important that the staffing and the finance for staffing for the public hospital is there from the state government so that radiation therapy can take place. We are a major regional city. People see Toowoomba as the capital of south-western Queensland and, in fact, people come from northern New South Wales and from many parts of Queensland for major services. We have around about 140,000 to 150,000 people living in our immediate vicinity and probably service 250,000 or more. It is essential that we have radiation therapy at such a major hospital.

There have been reports in our local media of a very sad case of a young mother who nearly lost her baby due to a misdiagnosis at the hospital. My concern is that the staff at the hospital are under pressure regarding time and under pressure regarding the use of equipment because of budget constrictions. I certainly hope that that misdiagnosis, which they apologised for, was not caused because of any pressure not to use ultrasound in this case. I think it is important that these modern tools of diagnosis are able to be used and that the hospital has an adequate budget to be able to undertake a particular diagnosis and do it accurately and correctly.

Crisis accommodation for those people who are in very unfortunate circumstances is essential in a major regional city. We are a true regional capital, servicing many, many people. Many young women from western Queensland, central Queensland or the Burnett often come to Toowoomba when they have had some tragic circumstance in their family, such as domestic violence or a marriage break-up. Many people come to our city when they have got children with disabilities in order to find some form of assistance and support in the rearing of those children. Many people come to our city when they have a mental illness because of the particular mental health facilities that we have.

We are a major regional city. As a result, there is a very big social need in the area of crisis accommodation. In particular, we need crisis accommodation for women. We have a need that is well above the size of our city because of the regional nature of our city and because it is a city that women flee to from other parts of the state. Secondly, we need crisis accommodation for youth because there are youth who are in need of crisis accommodation. We need crisis accommodation for those who have a

mental illness and may be receiving community mental health treatment or treatment at the Toowoomba Base Hospital and need somewhere to stay whilst they recover. There are other cases of people with particular disabilities and families with disabilities who need help.

Organisations in the city like Anglicare and many others do a wonderful job. Last year I went to see the Minister for Public Works and Housing about a particular place in Toowoomba that I felt was ideal to be able to provide a large number of rooms and assistance. I am grateful for the good hearing that he gave me and the investigations his department undertook, but I am disappointed that it did not come to fruition. I will continue to fight for that sort of accommodation.

I think one of the principles we have to look at when it comes to accommodation is that all governments of any colour have limited amounts of funds. We can lay the blame where we like for having or not having those funds, but sometimes if you can get a facility that will provide 40 good rooms which can be well run to provide that sort of accommodation for people, maybe you are better off to have that than to wait another 10 or 15 years for some you-beaut greenfield site that fits all the modern requirements. Many of these people simply want a roof over their head rather than being forced to live with someone who might bash them, or being forced to sleep under a bridge, in a car or in a tent in the park.

The point I make about crisis accommodation is that we have a wonderful service in town from the Salvation Army, but they are limited to 14 houses and they are always chock-a-block. We have a wonderful service from the likes of the Toowoomba Youth Service, St Vincent de Paul and the Catholic Church with some of the accommodation they provide, but we still have an urgent need for crisis accommodation. I saw the member for South Brisbane at a community cabinet meeting some years ago and I spoke to her about this issue. As I said, I have spoken to the Minister for Public Works. It is something we need and something we want to keep fighting for.

I want to say a couple of words about the Royal Agricultural Society of Queensland, the Show Society in Toowoomba, where I had the honour of being the general manager for some 13 years before coming in here. In recent years they have had some tough times. There was great courage shown by John McDonald who took on the position as president, supported by a wonderful committee and also Damon Phillips, the new CEO, who have worked extremely hard. They had a very successful show this year; they have turned the show right around. They have received assistance and support from the state government, which I am grateful for, and hopefully they will get some support from the city council. It is a major centre for events in the city. The last year I was there we staged 184 events. It brings a lot of major events and attractions to the city and is well worthy of support. I congratulate John McDonald and his team on the way they have turned that showground around.

I congratulate Superintendent Wayne Browning, who will be retiring in a couple of months, for the wonderfully strong leadership he has shown to Toowoomba police. He has brought about a lot of improvements in our city through his direction and experience. I wish him well in the future. I pledge that I, along with the wonderful staff that I have working in my electorate office, my wife and my electorate council will continue working hard for the people of Toowoomba South who have shown such confidence in me for the sixth time.