



Speech by

Paul Hoolihan

MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

Hansard Tuesday, 9 November 2004

SHOALWATER BAY, SMART BOMBS

Mr HOOLIHAN (Keppel—ALP) (11.54 a.m.): Australians, and particularly Queenslanders, should have concerns at our American alliance when they see Leahy's cartoon in today's *Courier-Mail*, as it says it all. Queensland is to become a target for experimental American weaponry, which was also headlined on page 1 of the *Courier-Mail* on 5 November. Back in July the Minister for Defence, Senator Hill, outlined a substantial upgrading of training facilities at Bradshaw and Delamere training areas in the Northern Territory and at Shoalwater Bay in my electorate. This was to be undertaken in time for a projected exercise, *Talisman Sabre*, in 2007. Very little additional information was provided to the community at that time and, despite a reply from the minister to a letter from me seeking that information, not much further detail has been forthcoming and no community consultation has been undertaken.

Bear in mind that this decision was made during the life of the last parliament. How much more arrogant will the federal government become now that it has control of both Houses? Is the latest effort part of that arrogance? The original announcement was viewed with concern on the Capricorn Coast and a public meeting in Yeppoon was attended by approximately 1,500 people. Those concerns related to an American base, which is now not to occur, the impact on the land and sea environment, the weaponry to be used having regard to the use of depleted uranium in American armaments, and the basing of substantial equipment in the Capricornia area together with associated personnel and the difficulties experienced by communities near permanent facilities.

I was advised by the minister that there would only be visiting troops. Permanent presence of personnel and some pre-positioning of training equipment may occur if requested. It had been indicated that some 20,000 troops would be involved. We now discover that Shoalwater Bay is to be used to test and experiment with smart bombs, supposedly cutting-edge technology, according to Professor Ross Babbage, former senior ANZUS treaty adviser. Why is this experienced adviser reported in the *Courier-Mail* on 5 November as commenting, 'What I can see happening is rather more than what has been revealed.'?

The people of Queensland, and central Queensland in particular, are being treated like mushrooms. Experimental self-guided smart bombs are reported as being proposed for testing. What are they and why can they not be tested in the United States—maybe in Texas near the president's ranch? If there are no worries about their use that should not be a problem. What other experimental weaponry will be introduced and what will be the impact on Australia and the environment in Shoalwater Bay? What will be the impact on the residents of the area? When an American fighter plane can fire 25 cannon rounds into a school in America which is five miles from its training range, how safe will the residents of areas surrounding the training area be when any experimental weaponry is let loose?

There is no doubt that a financial benefit will flow to the region by the visit of substantial numbers of visiting troops. Training benefits will also flow to the ADF by training with other armed forces. Our region has been host to the Singaporean Army for some time. They have a repair facility in Rockhampton and the region derives financial and cultural benefits from their presence. They use current weaponry and both Australian and Singaporean forces derive experience from their joint training. The region will also receive a

benefit from the visit of American troops, but we want them to leave behind all the weaponry which may be detrimental to our physical wellbeing and safety.

We should all call on the Minister for Defence to immediately provide details of any of these experimental weapons which are to be imported into Australia. I have invited him to personally visit the electorate and meet with the community to address their concerns. I hope he accepts that invitation. Our community will bear the full impact of any visiting forces to Shoalwater Bay so why can we not be provided with all information relating to the weaponry to be used by them? After all, Australia is our country.