



Speech by

## Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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### MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

#### DEATH OF HON. SIR JOH BJELKE-PETERSEN

**Miss SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—NPA) (10.39 am): Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen's time as Premier of Queensland was overwhelmingly good for this state. It is a powerful legacy when nearly all of the major infrastructure was built by Joh and the Nationals within the 19 years of his premiership.

The abolition of death duties has been mentioned, but it is a personal issue for my family. My father moved this motion in the party room, but it was Sir Joh who knew that it was good for Queensland, who carried it forward and who saw it adopted. Many members do not realise what a cruel tax death duties was. My mother's family suffered the death of two breadwinners within a very short period and also the double whammy of death duties. It was an iniquitous tax that brought real hardship to people. It meant that on many occasions people were paying tax on property from which there were no profits and they were paying tax when they had lost breadwinners. Death duties was a tax that was felt not only in Queensland but also throughout Australia. When Joh and the Nationals abolished death duties, we saw that death duties right throughout Australia were abolished, and quite rightly. The abolition of death duties started a population drift to Queensland. There was a realisation that if people wanted to get things done then Queensland was the place to be. That was reflected in all the other major projects that were occurring in this great state.

As has been mentioned, Joh had a strong family and a strong faith. Many people used to lampoon him for that faith but, as we have seen in the past few days, his family's great dignity and their faith have carried them through.

One of the things that I was not looking forward to with Sir Joh's passing was not the fact that he would be going to a better place but that some people do not know when to give up the hate. They do not realise that political differences are one thing but hate that lasts for generations is a thing that creates civil wars. It is not healthy in a society. We must understand that there are differences in philosophy. I believe that that kind of black hate eats away at the soul and does not enhance democracy.

There was a wonderful array of people at Sir Joh's funeral, but I want to acknowledge in particular Eric Deeral, the first and only Aboriginal who has been elected to this parliament. Also at the funeral were representatives from the Torres Strait Islands, including George Mye, a well-respected Torres Strait Islands elder. Gough Whitlam tried to give away part of the Torres Strait Islands. This very important group of people did not want their area to become part of Papua New Guinea. They wanted to remain with Australia. Those people have a wonderfully rich culture. I think we all agree that it is important that, as Australians, we appreciate them and support their aims and aspirations.

Lawrence addressed the gerrymander myth—the electoral weight system that did not keep Labor out of power in Queensland. It was just an excuse for the Joh haters for why they were not in power while Joh was so popular—and he was popular. It was only when Labor won more than 50 per cent of the vote that it won government.

Also, some so-called civil libertarians and some older journalists who hated Joh and who still hate him today called him corrupt. That is interesting to note when we understand the extensive legal process undertaken by the Fitzgerald inquiry and afterwards. There has never been such a ferocious process of going back through people's financial records. Joh was not prosecuted for corruption. He was left with a hefty legal bill, which proved to be a great penalty for defending his name, but he was not prosecuted for corruption. To those civil libertarians who want to brand people, convict them and put them in jail when the evidence does not stack up, it must be remembered that, in terms of Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen's record, that is not part of his history.

I want to conclude my contribution by giving recognition to Joh's family. We really see the mark of a person by those who are closest to them, particularly their children and their other closest relatives. I have a great deal of respect for the Bjelke-Petersen family. I know some of Joh's children better than I knew him. They are the finest of people. They are great contributors to their community, like their father was. Not surprisingly, Joh's children are not so much in the public arena, because it is a brutal arena. They have known better than any that politics is brutal on families. I want to acknowledge Joh's family and pass on my condolences to them. I also want to pass on my condolences to Lady Florence Bjelke-Petersen, who is a wonderful lady. She is incredibly strong and incredibly dignified. As well as being a lady in her own right, she represented this state for 12 years as a senator. I give my condolences to Joh's family. May Joh rest in peace.