



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

Hansard Tuesday, 25 October 2005

FLYING FOXES, CHARTERS TOWERS

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (11.51 am): This morning on behalf of the residents of Charters Towers I tabled in front of the Premier of Queensland a petition containing 3,327 signatures calling for this government to take action and rid the city of Charters Towers of virus- and parasite-carrying smelly flying foxes. The residents of Charters Towers are asking for something very simple and not asking for too much, just that the government place the quality of life—

A government member interjected.

Mr KNUTH: Does the member have a bit of sympathy for the flying foxes? As I was saying, we ask that the government place the quality of life of residents—this includes the nursing mums, the sick, the frail and the elderly—before a smelly pest. How hard is this for a government that has 61 seats in the parliament of Queensland? You have had the opportunity to issue the appropriate permits time and time again, but you choose not to. Why is this? Who are you frightened of? I ask the environment minister and the Premier if they would like to live among the infestation of ticks and parasites in their backyards? Would they like to be woken at 4 o'clock every morning by thousands of screeching flying foxes and put up with the stench and the filth associated with these pests? Would they like to be exposed year in, year out to lethal viruses? And you call out to the health department and the Environmental Protection Agency for help, they advise that the problem is a complex issue and say that, in the best interests of the flying fox, you should sell your unsaleable homes and move elsewhere.

Does the government believe it is appropriate for babies to be bitten by ticks, for young mums to hide their children indoors, for the elderly to break out in rashes, for people to remove their pristine trees and for people to hang clothes out in the back of their sheds because of bat excreta? I say to the Premier: is it appropriate for the elderly to be unable to use their airconditioners in 40-degree heat because of the flying fox stench that penetrates through their homes and yet be unable to go out to enjoy the outdoor coolness because when they do they are subjected to the same stench? Does he feel that it is appropriate that Charters Towers is losing its pristine trees because of these vermin?

The government can solve this problem. It is simple. For five years we had to put up with this scourge. All residents are asking for is what is contained in this petition; that is, to place the quality of life of residents before flying foxes and for local authorities or Parks and Wildlife to be granted permission to cull the bats or harass the bats all day, every day—and that includes the middle of the day—until the flying foxes are permanently driven outside the vicinity of the residential area. Is that so hard? The current permits have proven to be totally useless and ineffective. What is the use of harassing the bats at 5 o'clock in the afternoon when they are about to flap away anyway or at 5 o'clock or 7 o'clock in the morning when residents are sound asleep and preparing their children for school?

All of these years the Premier has refused to issue the permits to harass the bats between 7 am and 5 pm because he believes that by doing this the bats will stress out. Is this not placing the flying fox before the stressed-out residents? Residents are spending thousands of dollars pruning. They are chopping down pristine trees to rid homes of flying foxes. Does the government want everyone in Charters Towers to chop down their trees? I call on this government to compensate the residents of Charters Towers for the

increase in rates, the property damage because of bat excreta and the loss of property value because people cannot sell or rent their homes because of these vermin. I will be calling on our local council to send the bat bill to the Premier for payment.

Does the government feel it is appropriate for our local swimming pools to be used as a reservoir for bat excreta? According to a news report on Channel 7 on 16 October 2005, the bacteria levels in the Brisbane River are 10 times higher than normal due to a colony of bats and the boat ramp has been closed because of this contamination health risk. Yet our public swimming pools, residential homes and parks have been contaminated with this filth for five years. This is a serious issue. The latest *60 Minutes* report raised serious concerns of the bird flu threatening our shores and linked flying foxes to the potential cause. Does this government believe it is appropriate for residents to live with the threat of these viruses, including lyssa and Hendra virus?

This issue is not a new issue to this government. I have raised this issue many times before, in writing and in the parliament. Our local authorities and residents have raised their concerns to this government, but it continues to ignore them. I say to the Premier and the environment minister that the situation at Charters Towers is a shocking disgrace. I call on you as the government, who said they cared for all Queenslanders, to come to Charters Towers and solve this problem once and for all, because we are sick of the bats, the filth, the stench, the parasites, the destruction of our trees, the ticks, the property damage and the loss of value of our homes. If someone dies or falls seriously ill as a result of a flying fox, the Premier and the environment minister will be held accountable for their inaction.

Time expired.