



Speech by

Marc Rowell

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

Hansard Wednesday, 8 March 2006

CARDWELL RANGE; DICKSON, MR B

Mr ROWELL (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (9.42 pm): The fatal accident on the Bruce Highway's northbound lane at the Cardwell Range at approximately 8.30 last Saturday morning was a tragic loss for the Dickson family of Ingham. Twenty-six-year-old Ben Dickson left home in Ingham in his year-old Toyota Rav 4 to drive north, but when negotiating a blind bend on the northern side of the infamous Cardwell Range the vehicle veered into a ditch on the roadside, crossed a small ravine, then hit an embankment. The impact catapulted the vehicle up over four metres into a tree of some 500 millimetres in diameter. The vehicle landed across the highway on the southbound lane. The driver's side was severely damaged, causing the death of Ben Dickson.

I visited the site of the accident with his father, Barry, and a neighbour on Sunday afternoon. Barry was unable to control his emotions when coming to terms with the events that led to the fatality that had beset his son. It was evident that Barry had a strong paternal relationship with his son. Two hours earlier on that Saturday morning a non-fatal accident occurred only a few metres away from the site of Ben Dickson's tragic accident. Traffic was held up for over two kilometres while the highway was cleared.

The Dickson family was particularly disturbed when their son was taken 150 kilometres to Innisfail, due to the accident occurring 500 metres into the far-northern police region, rather than being brought back 10 kilometres to Ingham, where they reside, to facilitate identification. The Dickson home in Davidson Street was inundated with friends and neighbours paying their respects to Ben, whom many had known since he was born.

The northern side of the Cardwell Range is, without doubt, one of the narrowest, most dangerous winding sections of the Bruce Highway between Cairns and Brisbane. On various occasions I have lobbied for the standards that were implemented on the southern side of the range 20 years ago to be implemented on this inappropriate, patched-up, hazardous section of the range crossing and for it to receive the attention it deserves. But an adequate response has not been forthcoming.

Despite many fatal and numerous less serious accidents, this high-risk section of the highway, with its substantial increase in traffic, has barely received lip-service for the necessary planning and construction for a road that meets the demands of today's traffic. How many more fatalities will take place before this receives a high priority and thus reduces the incidence of accidents due mainly to the unsatisfactory state of the highway? It is absolutely reprehensible that we see this happening.