



Speech by

Mike Horan

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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (11.46 am): It is an honour and a privilege to take part in this debate today. I endorse the words spoken by our shadow minister. She spoke about the significant achievements of people such as Joan Sheldon, the first deputy premier of this state, and Yvonne Chapman, the first cabinet minister, and she also spoke about the introduction by the coalition government of paid maternity leave in the Queensland Public Service. But I think today we are really focusing on women overall, not only what their achievements have been but also what we should strive for in the future to give the women in our community every chance and every opportunity.

As the shadow minister for primary industries, I want to speak about rural women and the amazing and fantastic role that rural women have played over the generations. Not only have they raised their families in what would have sometimes been difficult circumstances due to the vagaries of the weather—the droughts, floods, pestilence and so forth—and fluctuating commodity prices; in many cases they have also seen to their children's education and been intimately involved in the running of the farm operation.

I can well remember when my wife and I went to a dairy farm in the early 1970s in the Gympie district in the Mary Valley. There were five farms in our pocket of the Mary River. I was quite amazed at the involvement of all the women in the running of their farm operations and at the fulfilment and confidence that they had because of their major involvement in the business. In fact, most of those farming operations just could not and would not have existed had it not been for the women who were arranging the vets, doing the herd recording and the accounts, running in and out of town to get parts, helping pull calves out, helping to milk, helping to feed the calves and helping with just about everything but, at the same time, getting the kids on the school bus, worrying about where the next dollar was going to come from when the cattle prices crashed and the milk price went down, taking part in P&C organisations and so forth.

I think one of the amazing things in the rural industry of recent years is the number of young women who have moved into consultancy positions in agriculture. Particularly in the cotton industry and the agriculture industry, there are a number of young women who have moved into organisations like AgForce and QFF and who are playing major lobbying roles. That is backed up not only in many cases by their rural background but also by a university degree or qualifications that equip them very well for the job.

There have been amazing changes in society over the last two or three decades. All young women now—hopefully, all young women—go through to grade 12 and they have the opportunity to go to TAFE or university. I remember as a father when my daughter got her degree hoping that she would be able to use that degree and that it would be fulfilling to her. Young women now often have their families later, but when they do have their families they want to return to their career. They want to do what they have been trained for. That brings about the need for child care.

I think child care is one of the most important things in our modern society. We need flexible child care. I congratulate organisations like the Kath Dickson Family Centre in Toowoomba. Kath Dickson was a pioneer when she introduced child care into our city, and indeed into Queensland. She was the first female principal in Queensland. Child care is absolutely essential to the modern family and for the care of children.

I also believe that the care of children with disabilities is important. All of us have probably struck young mothers who are absolute heroes in the way they care for their children who have a disability. Often they are trying to look after them and the rest of their family while sometimes holding down a part-time job, but mostly they are not in a position to be able to work. I think all governments should aspire to assist in that regard. I also commend Young Women's Place in Toowoomba on the successful battle it finally won to get a full-time midwife to help young women through their pregnancies.

I want to finish by talking about the importance of motherhood and family. Whilst we all talk about careers and degrees and study, one of the greatest professions of all is motherhood. We should never, ever devalue the wonderful work that women do in bearing children, in raising children, in looking after not only their children but the rest of their family. Very often in modern life they now have to juggle that with the fast pace of life, jobs, careers and other things. Anything that we can do to ensure that motherhood is safeguarded, protected and supported, particularly in areas like child care, is our task for the future.