



Speech by

Ray Hopper

MEMBER FOR DARLING DOWNS

Hansard Tuesday, 28 November 2006

TARONG ENERGY

Mr HOPPER (Darling Downs—NPA) (12.30 pm): I wish to draw the attention of the House to a proposal by Tarong Energy to run a conveyor belt, or a train line, from Acland coalmine in my electorate to Tarong Power Station. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that, except that the train line, or conveyor belt, would cut straight through the homes and facilities of two dairy farms, which are owned by the Vonhoff and Wieck families.

The plans for New Hope Coal and Tarong Energy were brought to my attention a few weeks ago. I have to say that when I sighted the map in question and the plans for the conveyor belt, or train line, I was simply horrified. I table that map and aerial photo of the proposed route.

Tabled paper: Map and aerial photograph.

The key point is that instead of being sited in a direct route from the mine to the power station, the line, or conveyor belt, takes a five-kilometre deviation and runs straight through these two dairy farms.

I want to make my position on this matter clear. The Tarong Power Station needs a 25-year supply of coal to keep its turbines running so that we can all have electricity. We all know that power must be produced and generated in Queensland. There are a few options for Tarong Energy. One is to build this line, or conveyor belt, from Tarong to Acland. Another source of coal for the Tarong Power Station may be at Kunioon, which is just north of the Tarong Power Station. I understand that the coal in that area is being tested to see whether it will be suitable to burn. Another option would be for a rail line to be built through to Wilga Creek. About five or six years ago land for that line was sought and not one compulsory acquisition of land was required in order to put that corridor in place. So credit must be given to those people who worked with the farmers who were involved in terms of the implementation of that proposed route.

I have been advised that no decisions will be made until June 2007. I have always had a brilliant working relationship with the Acland coalmine and I wish that relationship to continue. But this proposal to run a train line, or conveyor belt, straight through these two dairy farms is simply wrong. It means that the conveyor belt has to run an extra five kilometres. It also means the compulsory acquisition of these properties or the compulsory acquisition of the easements at taxpayers' expense.

My constituents believe that New Hope is deliberately wanting to acquire their farms to get their water allocations. Water is vital for the washing of coal and also for the Acland Pastoral Co., which was recently formed to make money from the land that was acquired around the mine. However, Acland has applied for a 10,000-head feedlot licence for a feedlot that will be situated on a neighbouring property to that of the two dairy farmers who are affected by this proposal. We all know how much water is needed for a feedlot. What better way to ruin a property than to build a train line straight through the house and dairy—actually, straight through the dining room?

The chances of the train line being positioned on these two neighbouring properties so that it goes directly through these houses, as it is shown on this map, would be a million to one. I smell a rat. I express my concerns for my two constituents. These properties are massive—over 1,000 acres each. That proposed train line will run right through their homes, a dairy and a harvest store.

This proposal needs to be questioned. Tarong Energy has advised me that there are a number of routes that could be feasible, yet no other map showing those routes has been produced. I asked Tarong Energy to show me a map of the other proposed routes. We have seen only the one map. If there are so many other routes that could be feasible, why have no other maps showing those routes been given to me?

If the proposed route that I am talking about ends up being the chosen route, as the local member it is my duty to refer this to the CMC for investigation. There seems to be so many other shorter routes that can be adopted without there being the need to destroy two family dairy farms. The Vonhoffs have planted 15,000 trees on their farm. The Wiecks have received many awards for their dairying. These people are third and fourth generation farmers. They are brilliant people who are doing a good job. They do not need this impost on them.

No doubt this train line has to be built, but it has to be done in a compassionate and sensible way. The train line can run along the boundaries of these two properties, which would cause very little angst to the people involved. We all agree that industry must be allowed to progress. I am very concerned about what I have seen on this map and the lack of consultation that has been conducted. I have been asked to call a public meeting. There is no sense in calling a public meeting until we know where the route is going.