



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

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GREGORY DEVELOPMENT ROAD

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (8.42 pm): I bring to the attention of the House the shocking state of the Gregory Development Road, particularly the section between Greenvale and Bluewater Springs. It is not ethical and is downright dangerous for regular road users to be confronted by triple road trains on a single sealed road with winding bends and no vision or warning of any oncoming traffic, and when any slight veering will send them down an embankment into a tree or into the path of an oncoming prime mover.

Local road users refer to this road as a billy goat track and a one-lane nightmare. In the past two years there has been at least one fatality and 23 accidents on the road between Charters Towers and Greenvale. Two of those accidents involved bulk fuel tankers which overturned and ruptured, spilling diesel. It took up to nine hours to clean up each of those accidents.

In recent times there has been a significant increase in population both within the township of Greenvale and in surrounding districts. Since 2002 Greenvale has grown from a population of 60 to 150. A large number of new mines have kicked off, such as Kagara Zinc Mine at Conjuboy Station. Two hundred people are employed at the mine site. There are a number of other mines such as Sapphire Mine at Mount Fox, Christmas Creek Mine and Pandanus Marble Mine. Metallica Minerals is also aiming to develop a nickel processing operation by 2009, which is tipped to generate up to \$120 million a year in revenue. Ark Homes also uses this section of road and will move 50 of its homes through to the Gulf in the next 12 months.

The transport, grazing, tourist and mining industries, as well as Townsville enterprises, the Charters Towers Chamber of Commerce, local residents and parents are screaming out for this road to be upgraded. The road is heavily used by road train triples that service the mines, livestock carriers and an increasing number of tourists who are usually hauling caravans on what is, for extensive sections, a one-way road. Many of those tourists are not accustomed to driving on roads in such a shocking state. It is a recipe for disaster if the road is left in its current state. Each day Kagara Zinc alone requires 48 round trips by 80-tonne payload triples travelling from Balcooma to Thalanga. That will happen every day for the next five years.

Huge amounts of royalties and payroll taxes come from local mines. That money is paid directly to the state government. It is estimated to be up to \$18 million per year in full production. In the past few weeks, those in charge of school buses made the decision not to transport children to school while it was raining, as it is too dangerous to face oncoming prime movers in wet conditions. Kagara Zinc ceased transport operations for two weeks because it was unable to transport during the wet. In addition, during recent wet weather the Bruce Highway was cut off for almost a week and supplies ran out very quickly.

Fast-tracking the upgrade of the Gregory Development Road would not only create an inland highway during the wet but would also relieve traffic congestion from the coast, reduce accidents, open up investments to the region and save lives. I call on the minister for transport to recognise the urgent need to fix this road once and for all and to seek extra funding through the Cabinet Budget Review Committee.