



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (9.08 pm): It is a great honour to be elected as a member of the 52nd Parliament of Queensland. As I said in my first speech, I would like to acknowledge those who fought and fell to preserve our flag, our Constitution and the freedom that we have inherited to this day. These brave men and women are the true heroes of our nation.

I want to acknowledge the thousands of people who are proud to display the Australian flag on Australia Day. It is wonderful to see such patriotism and people proud to be an Aussie. It is also important that we continue to uphold the Australian way of life. I want to acknowledge those who are most important to me. First, I want to thank my wife, Heather, who has helped me share the burden that all members and candidates endure before, during and after an election campaign. I also want to thank my children, Anna, Joel, Daniel and Naomi, who have been a wonderful inspiration. Many thanks go to my electorate council chairman, Neil Dunbar, and his wife, Margaret, who have been a tremendous support over the years. My deepest appreciation goes to the branch members, booth workers and supporters. Without them it would be impossible to carry out the ginormous responsibility that is in front of us all.

As the elected member for the electorate of Charters Towers, I am proud to represent a rural electorate and the people who reside in the 32 towns and the rural areas. However, there are many issues in the electorate that need addressing. I once again want to bring to the attention of the roads minister the shocking state of the Gregory Development Road, particularly the section between Greenvale and Bluewater Springs. It is not ethical and it is downright dangerous to allow regular road users to be confronted by triple road trains on a single sealed road with winding bends, no vision or warning of any oncoming traffic where any slight veering will see you end up down an embankment into a tree or head-on into an oncoming prime mover. Local road users refer to this road as a billygoat track and a one-lane nightmare. There has been at least one fatality and 23 accidents in the last two years between Charters Towers and Greenvale. Two of them involved bulk fuel tankers which overturned and ruptured, spilling diesel which took up to nine hours to clean up.

In recent times there has been a significant increase in population, both within the township of Greenvale as well as the surrounding districts. Greenvale has grown from a population of 60 to 150 since 2002 and there have been a number of new mines kicking off, such as Kagara Zinc mine at Conjuboy Station which employs 200 people at the mine site. There are also a number of other mines such as Sapphire mine at Mount Fox, Christmas Creek mine at Christmas Creek Station just 40 kilometres south of Greenvale and the Pandanus marble mine at Pandanus Station. Metallica Minerals is also aiming for a 2009 nickel-processing operation tipped to generate up to \$120 million a year in revenue. This site is in the vicinity of the old Greenvale nickel mine as well as a smaller deposit at Lucky Break south of Greenvale. Ark Homes also uses this section of road and will move 50 houses through to the gulf in the next 12 months. The transport, grazing, tourist and mining industries as well as Townsville Enterprise, Charters Towers Chamber of Commerce, local residents and parents are screaming out for this road to be upgraded. This road is heavily used by ore road triples that service these mines, increased livestock carriers and an increased number of tourists hauling caravans on extended sections of a one-lane

roadway who are not accustomed to driving on roads in such a shocking state. It is a recipe for disaster if this road is left in its current state.

To meet its forecast production targets, it is estimated that Kagara Zinc alone will require 48 round trips a day of 80-tonne payload triples from Balcooma to Thalanga for the next five years. Huge amounts of royalties and payroll taxes from local mines are being paid directly to the state government, estimated to be up to \$18 million when the mine is in full production. In the last few weeks the school bus made the decision not to transport children to school while it was raining as it is too dangerous to face oncoming prime movers in some areas as little as three metres wide. Kagara Zinc ceased transport operations for two weeks because it was unable to transport ore because it was too dangerous during wet weather due to the narrowness of this road. To add to this, the Bruce Highway during the recent wet was cut off for almost a week, with supplies running out very quickly. Fast-tracking the upgrade of the Gregory Development Road would not only create an inland highway during the wet but also relieve traffic congestion from the coast, reduce accidents, open up investment to the region as well as save lives. I call on the minister for transport to recognise the urgent need to fix this road once and for all and seek extra funding through the Cabinet Budget Review Committee.

Just this week in Charters Towers it was reported that five local businesses had their front windows smashed. A school student was also badly beaten by a gang of youths. These reports are a regular occurrence. Just a few years ago within a three-month period there were 223 offences committed in Charters Towers with 68 offenders charged, only to receive a slap on the wrist. There are reports of children as young as 10 roaming the streets late into the night in Charters Towers and Townsville. Put simply, having these children roaming the streets at night is simply a recipe for disaster. Residents are sick and tired of their cars being trashed, their homes being entered and shop windows smashed and spat on. It is time the state government stopped ignoring this problem because these young criminals are becoming more and more brazen in their acts of theft, wilful damage and violence and have no respect for the law or authority. I am not talking about kids out at night watching a movie; I am talking about juveniles breaking into homes, terrorising people and those who are out there to deliberately inflict and cause serious bodily harm to others.

People in our communities have lost their right to feel safe in their own homes. It has got to the stage where people will begin taking the law into their own hands and will inevitably end up being the ones in jail. I call on the government to take action and do something about this crime problem. I call on this government to provide more police on the beat to combat and crack down on juvenile crime. There need to be stronger laws introduced by the police minister to ensure an ongoing crackdown on youth gangs. We need to investigate the Cleveland Detention Centre—known as 'Camp Cleveland'—which provides good food, games and new track shoes. Spending time there is regarded as a badge of honour amongst gangs. The Cleveland Detention Centre should be a deterrent for juvenile offenders. However, this centre has become a place where juveniles are prepared to steal, destroy property, become a public nuisance and inflict serious body harm on the elderly and other people just so they can get into the place.

Ms Jarratt interjected.

Mr KNUTH: So the member does not care about the elderly? Is it a good thing that they should belt the elderly in the night and we do nothing? Is the member saying that it is their parents' fault so we say nothing?

Residents need a guarantee from the state government that everything possible will be done to protect their lives, their property and their safety. We keep hearing about how the Beattie government has taken a tough stance on traffic offences in terms of revenue raising. Well, it is time the Beattie government took a tough stance on juvenile crime.

As little as 40c a toad could eliminate the toxic pest from Australia. In 1935, 101 toads were released at Gordonvale in far-north Queensland in an effort to stop beetles destroying sugarcane crops. They were a spectacular failure in dealing with the beetles, and since then the cane toad has spread across Australia. The toad is believed to occupy more than 500,000 square kilometres of Australia and travel in excess of 40 kilometres each year. The toad is a disgusting creature and one of the most destructive creatures to our environment, killing our native species, poisoning our wells and waterholes, taking over native habitats and spreading thick throughout this country. Attempts to biologically control the pest have been expensive and so far ineffective. The simplest, most effective way to rid the country of the pest would be a bounty. If 3,000 toads were collected and only half of those were female, this would represent 45 million eggs not produced. Some 3,000 collected toads at 40c a toad would cost \$1,200. Just \$1,200 has the potential to eliminate 45 million toads hopping around in our environment.

Government members interjected.

Mr KNUTH: I am sure that members opposite would support this, because they are not too sympathetic towards the toad. This filthy vermin is killing our native species. I am sure that government members will back this proposal. It is absolutely brilliant. As they would realise, nothing else has been effective. Science has let us down, and the Labor Party will be backing this proposal because this will have

great benefits for this country, help our native wildlife and also generate a bit of pocket money for our children. Those opposite know that this is a great thing. Nothing has worked. I am sure the minister for natural resources will be backing the project, because he knows that everything else has failed. They are looking for answers. They are crying out for answers! We have the answer here tonight—that is, to introduce a 40c bounty because kids out there are belting toads now for nothing. They are belting toads anyway. We know that. Those opposite belted toads. We belted toads. As soon as someone like Shane Knuth, the member for Charters Towers, brings it up as a suggestion, we are told that it is cruel, it is barbaric and there are other solutions. People say, 'We will look to science. Science has the answer.' But, if those opposite had thought this idea up, they would be backing it. It is just like the Bradfield Scheme. It is a bad idea, but the moment the Premier supports it—

Mr SCHWARTEN: I rise to a point of order. I think the honourable member ought to be careful or someone will belt him on the head to put him out of his misery.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Moorhead): There is no point of order, but we have to keep conversation in the chamber to a minimum.

Mr KNUTH: I rise to a point of order. I find the minister's words offensive and I ask him to withdraw.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I do not think I called the member a toad, but anyway.

Mr KNUTH: This is a very important issue and this initiative will work. We just have to take it on board and forget the politics. Let us just go out there and get rid of the toads. We should not worry about whether it was the member for Charters Towers who came up with the idea. This is a good solution. In north Queensland every yard can average eight to 50 toads. If each person in a city or a community were to clean up their own patch, within a very short period there would not be one toad left in the community. The incentive that would be provided would ensure that the result would be positive.

Any concerns that kids may be poisoned by toads are absolute nonsense. As members know, kids are proactive: they jump around in flooded streams and they play cricket, Rugby League and other contact sports that are far more dangerous than collecting toads. There is a fear that kids might be poisoned. Members opposite say that they care and that they are concerned that the kids will be poisoned by the toads. Encouraging participants to wear gloves and glasses while collecting toads will reduce any risk of them being poisoned to the point at which there is no risk at all.

In communities such as Gladstone a group of adults and children call themselves the Toadbusters. They set out to capture the pests armed with gloves and glasses. They do it for the satisfaction of catching toads. But how much more effective would their actions be if there was a bounty? Residents across the state would be willing to help out for a few bucks reward. Even the RSPCA has cautiously supported this option, because it is a more humane way of disposing of the pests. Anyway, as I said, it is not uncommon for kids to get out there and give the toads a good belting.

This plan could be supported financially through the Natural Heritage Trust or through funding from the state government's pest management program. Freezers could be placed in communities in the same manner as pig boxes are placed in communities. The freezers could be administered by local councils. How simple is that?

The majority of north Queenslanders believe that this system will work. If members saw the results of the surveys that were conducted in the towns across Australia they would see that people want something done about the toads and think that this is a great idea. Members should have a guess as to who opposed it. The minister for natural resources. He thought that it was not a good idea. He was hoping that science would fix the problem. Scientists have been looking for an answer to the problem for 50 years. Twelve months ago the minister supported belting toads. He thought that it was a great idea. But when the member for Charters Towers raised the matter he says that it is not a good idea. It is not a good idea only because it is not his idea. If it was the minister's idea, he would be backing it and the other members opposite would also be backing it. It is a good proposal and it will work.

The bounty has gained a lot of support from parents, grandparents and children. These kids or unemployed people can collect 50 toads and receive \$20 in return. That would create an opportunity for kids to earn some pocket money while doing something positive for our environment. We will be waiting 50 years before science finds a solution to the toad problem. By that time our pristine natural habitat and our native species will be in dire straits.

Mr Johnson: What about the bats?

Mr KNUTH: On the subject of bats, for six years they have been flapping around Charters Towers, driving people up the wall. They carry a lethal virus. People have been putting up with the ticks, the parasites and the stench that come with these bats. I call on the government to help solve this problem. In Charters Towers, elderly people are wearing bandages. What did the area get from the government? 'The poor flying foxes. Where are they going to go? You have taken over their habitat. They have to have somewhere to live.' Who cares about the flying foxes? We need to look after the residents, including the children, of Charters Towers. It would be wonderful if a minister came to Charters Towers and said, 'You

poor buggers! How on earth for six years have you put up with this filth, this stench and this environmental risk? We have to take action and do something once and for all. The greatest dream of the people of Charters Towers is for someone to come along and say, 'We will do something.'

Mr Schwarten: The final solution.

Mr KNUTH: It is a final solution and it is a good solution. I have only four minutes left. I would like raise serious concerns regarding the closure of maternity wards and obstetric delivery units in rural and regional Queensland. Over the past 10 years the ability of regional women to have a child in their area has been taken away from them. The people who reside in the Charters Towers electorate would like to know why the government has allowed this situation to occur.

The greatest gift to a family and a community is a new-born baby. For parents, it is unparalleled to anything else that occurs in their lives. Nothing in this world can measure the depth and joy that a new-born child brings to a family. Hospitals in the towns of Moranbah, Clermont, Hughenden, Richmond, Alpha and Aramac have lost their ability to deliver a critical component of health care to their people. In Charters Towers, which has a combined shire population of 12,500 people, its hospital will deliver babies only under certain conditions.

The state government is denying women the ability to have an uncomplicated delivery surrounded by their family in their local surroundings. It is unacceptable to compel pregnant women to travel hundreds of kilometres away from their home towns to major coastal cities to give birth to their babies. That is an unnecessary financial burden. It puts a strain on families. It separates mothers from their families for periods of up to three weeks during a very special time of their lives.

It is not the fault of the mothers that the maternity services in their home towns have closed down. It is vitally important that we recognise the financial strain that is imposed on those families who have to pay the cost of the travel and motel expenses that are involved when pregnant mothers wait for periods of up to three weeks before they give birth. I am referring to uncomplicated pregnancies. Once women could give birth to their babies in the hospitals in their home towns. That is no longer so. When I was a kid, I always presumed that the hospital was a place where women gave birth to babies. Over the past 10 to 12 years, that has not been the case in these rural and regional towns.

Usually, many families are not informed, or are completely unaware, of the patient travel and motel subsidies that they can claim for the time that they are away from home awaiting the birth of their babies. I believe it is paramount that at all times Queensland Health provides information packs to advise all patients of what they can claim to help alleviate the financial cost that they have to incur through no fault of their own. If the government is going to take away a women's right to have her baby in her home town, that must be the minimum that it should offer.

This whole issue begins with a lack of doctors and a lack of support for doctors to maintain their obstetric registration. Then there is no money with which to maintain the maternity units. The government then uses that to justify its decision to remove funding to provide and train midwives. So the community gets done over three times. The Labor government caused the problem and it has made it worse. This is a vital issue and one that needs to be rectified. It is paramount that funds and greater incentive packages are provided to encourage doctors and nurses to work and be trained in rural and regional hospitals. It has been proved that if people are trained as nurses in rural and regional hospitals they will stay loyal to the hospital and become strong and valued members of the community.

Vegetation management plays a very big part in my electorate, a large percentage of which is comprised of small, medium and large blocks. It is no exaggeration that many people living in rural electorates are frustrated and angry because they have been gutted by a government whose policies are not compatible with the needs of country Queensland. The myth that landowners are environmental vandals who are destroying the Great Barrier Reef, pumping the rivers dry and depleting the ozone layer is hypothetical nonsense that has been dreamed up.

Time expired.