



Speech by

Ted Malone

MEMBER FOR MIRANI

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CLEAN COAL TECHNOLOGY SPECIAL AGREEMENT BILL; APPROPRIATION BILLS

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (7.53 pm): Tonight it is a pleasure to rise to speak on the Appropriation Bill and the clean coal cognate bill. Firstly, I would like to talk a little about the amalgamation of shires. While most members in the parliament may think that that has nothing to do with the budget, I can assure them that it has.

The budget makes no allocation for the resources that local governments provide throughout Queensland. I know that some members in this House come from urban Queensland, so I assure them that the councils of the area that I represent—between Rockhampton and Mackay, and out to Moranbah—are doing a marvellous job in addressing the concerns of the people who live in those areas. They do not just collect rates and provide minimal services such as filling potholes and collecting rubbish.

Shire councils in my electorate and across Queensland, particularly in rural areas, provide funding for projects such as attracting tourists to their areas. They provide funding for community groups such as the progress associations along the shore and the SES and rural fire brigades, which they organise.

There is 400 kilometres of highway in my electorate. Little places like St Lawrence would be almost wiped out if the administration of the Broadsound shire disappeared. In the small town of St Lawrence, the workers from the Broadsound Shire Council make up the rural fire brigade, the SES and the ambulance brigade. The person who looks after the ambulance brigade is an employee of the council. When there is an accident—and there are many, I have to tell the House—on the highway between Rockhampton and Sarina, the people who help those involved or who just put the fires out are not necessarily volunteers but are people employed by local government. Therefore, when looking at the whole plan of amalgamations, let us hope that common sense prevails. We must realise that there will be a cost back to the government through the budget. Somehow or other, those services will still have to be provided, although certainly it will not be by local ratepayers. I hope that we see some common sense in that process.

I turn to the highway that runs along the coast between Rockhampton and Mackay. In this chamber I have always advocated seven-day-a-week, driver-reviver sites. When those driver-reviver sites work, people actually spend time there and I believe that the road is far safer because of that. However, the project is underfunded. The volunteers who man the station work under very difficult conditions, and it needs to be upgraded. In addition, the highway has very few overtaking lanes. While that is a federal government initiative, we need the cooperation of the state government to improve the situation. Something should be done about that as quickly as possible.

With the new regulations for heavy vehicle drivers, there is also the need to upgrade facilities for truck drivers so that they can take time out and do not have to push themselves to get either to Marlborough or Sarina, which is about a two and a half hour drive. Many drivers have come into my office to express concern about the new regulations. On the night that the legislation was passed, the member for Fitzroy and I had a little yarn across the chamber. I was concerned about the fact that some of the transport infringement officers would take umbrage at slight infringements in the logbook calculations and

the filling out of the logbook. I have to tell the member for Fitzroy that that is happening and a number of drivers have come into my office to tell me about it.

One man was fined \$600 and six points for not actually adding up hours, and also because he did not designate where he started from, even though every third day he started from the same place in Sarina. After two such fines, that person has shifted to Western Australia and left his family in Sarina. He can no longer drive on the road because if he gets another fine he will be out of the game. He cannot afford the fines, so another very good and experienced driver has left the industry. That is happening on a regular basis. Something has to be done fairly quickly about it. I know the shadow minister is right across the deal. Let us hope we get some sense out of it.

Many times I have advocated the bypass on the Peak Downs Highway through Walkerston. Unfortunately, the budget did not provide money to even look at some protocols in relation to that project.

The health issue in Mackay is becoming very difficult. The Mackay Base Hospital is a reasonably old hospital. Certainly, areas towards the back of the hospital and the older part of the hospital look like Third World stuff. Unfortunately, the *Mercury* in Mackay did not really do the minister any favours by pointing out that no money has been allocated towards either a rebuild of the hospital or improvements to the hospital.

This is a big issue in Mackay. As members would know, the area around Mackay is growing very substantially. For specialist appointments, people have to travel either to Townsville or to Brisbane. Even though the patient subsidy system has been increased slightly, it does not even cover the cost of fuel. I would like to see a hotel or motel room that charges \$30 a day. There is a huge financial cost to people who have to travel with their family or relatives. They may have to leave their jobs for a period. Quite often, they get to Townsville or Brisbane and find that the appointment that they have made has been cancelled. They have to go back again and again and sometimes again. This is a big issue and sooner or later it has to be addressed.

Many years ago a certain amount of land was donated to the hospital board. When the Goss government came to power, it was sold off for residential use. It would be very handy to have that land right now so that we could build a new hospital on it.

In terms of education, with up to 2,500 blocks of land being developed in the Pioneer Valley, the Mirani High School is growing at a tremendous rate. Certainly over the next few years we will see a huge increase in numbers. As far as I am aware, the Mirani High School has never had a school renewal program, which most of the 1960s-plus schools have gone through. I know that the Sarina school received funding for that some time ago. Certainly there needs to be some upgrades at the Mirani High School. It is a great school with great teachers and great students—as there are right throughout the valley.

Sarina High School is forging ahead with its school centre. Through funding for school renewal they were able to buy land for an agricultural centre. With another \$450,000 from the federal government, that school worked towards creating a skills centre with welding equipment and lathes. Trainers from TAFE have come down to put the students through this skills centre, which is quite magnificent. As those students leave school they will be able to go directly into an apprenticeship. They would be trained to the stage at which they could probably skip a year in their apprenticeship.

More importantly, with 60 per cent of the school students going through the skills centre, the teachers are telling me that issues such as discipline and the attitude of students at the school have changed dramatically. The students are actually complaining that they have to go back to the school to attend parade for one hour every two weeks. They are rebelling against going back to school for that parade as that means they will miss an hour at the skills centre at Sarina High School.

The prep year got off to a reasonable start, except that in most of the 30-odd schools throughout my electorate there were real problems in terms of the resources that were available for the young ones. Most importantly, from conversations that I have had with teachers, resourcing issues relating to teacher aides has been a huge impost on them. The P&Cs and the parents of students in a couple of schools in my electorate have banded together to look at raising some money to put towards employing a part-time teacher or teacher aide to help out, which really is not their role.

We have a beautiful new police station at Sarina. I had been advocating for that new police station since I entered parliament, which is quite some time ago now. Unfortunately, we do not seem to be able to get enough police to fully man that station, and that is a real concern. As with all the other small rural towns in my electorate, Sarina is growing dramatically. The police station there needs to be fully manned all the time, as should the police station at Nebo where there is only one police officer. There are something like 3,000 single men staying in accommodation at Nebo at any one time. The police officer at Nebo is also trying to do the pilot work and the filling out of forms for the transport of wide loads through the Peak Downs Highway. It is almost an impossible task. There really should be a two-man station at Nebo as there

should be in the Pioneer Valley. I will be writing to the minister asking her to consider putting in extra resources in that region in my electorate.

Within the portfolio of Emergency Services one has to be really concerned about what is happening in relation to the QAS. The front-line paramedics are fighting for their survival, with imposed rosters that do not work and with stations being closed because there are insufficient staff to man them or remaining open but under the control of a junior trainee. If paramedics speak out they could be fined up to \$3,000. I have had grown men—paramedics who have seen the worst of the worst accidents—crying about the fact that they are under such pressure.

The staff talk about a union but, because of its close association with this government, it has worked hand in hand with the government to implement policies that are not necessarily in the best interests of its members. But suddenly in the last few months the union representative, Steve Crow, and his boss, Ron Monaghan, who is also the Queensland ALP state president, have woken up to the fact that their members are under huge stress and that highly trained and experienced paramedics are leaving the QAS in droves or, alternatively, working part-time. That is not really the best outcome for the QAS.

As the loony left's control of the government increases, we are seeing a continuing policy—

Ms Male: Loony left? Where did you get that from?

Mr MALONE: It is not as much as I could say. We see a continuing policy of, 'If there's a problem, print a glossy brochure and throw money at it.' We have seen this policy in operation in matters relating to health, electricity, water and the many other disasters that have been presided over by this government. As with those problems, the problems within the QAS have drawn the same predictable response—throw money at it. Indeed, in this budget the government is throwing \$50 million. Quite frankly, that money is needed but, unfortunately, at this stage that is about all that can be done to overcome the problem, because this government and its members sit by idly and allow this to happen around them.

For the sake of the hardworking paramedics and the people of Queensland, the minister has to take control of the situation and get rid of the bloated bureaucracy in the department. If he cannot do that, the Premier should step in and put somebody in charge who can. All members would be aware of the hard and dedicated work that is carried out by our paramedics and firefighters throughout Queensland.

The problems with the QAS began in 1998 when the then Leader of the Opposition, Mr Beattie, was looking for an incentive to win government. At that time a free ambulance service for pensioners, Seniors Card holders and their dependants sounded pretty good. It is interesting to note that at the time the coalition did not match it, because it was aware of the resources that would be required to deliver it. Consequently, as history will show, the coalition lost that election.

As a result, the Beattie government introduced the ambulance tax to cover the soaring cost. As shadow minister, during the debate on the introduction of the ambulance tax I predicted that there would never be enough resources to deliver the outcomes. Unfortunately, I was right. The Premier said that with the introduction of the new ambulance tax on our electricity accounts—a tax that stands at around about \$100 right now—we would have the best ambulance service in the world. What a hollow promise that turned out to be. Many property owners are paying the tax many times over. As I have predicted during debates in this chamber, the government was never going to be able to keep up with demand and, again, I have been proven to be correct.

Unfortunately, under pressure to respond to callouts from the commissioner down, the management has put unrealistic pressure on paramedics who, in return, are taking sick leave and stress leave at record levels and, unfortunately, are resigning in increasing numbers from the department.

No amount of money will fix the problem until the government gets the basics right. The response of the minister and the government is to throw more money at the problem. I have mentioned the \$50 million and the promise of more paramedics. But the problem is that any new paramedics will, in turn, be exposed to the harassment and bullying that is endemic in the QAS.

As has been proven by the department's inability to progress the development of infrastructure with most of the capital works planned for last year not delivered and, worse still, reannounced this year, the department is in crisis. A major emergency services complex developed in North Mackay in my electorate was opened almost two years ago and has had serious structural problems which, to this day, have not been fixed completely. Major roof leaks have caused extensive mould, making the building almost uninhabitable. That is only one of the building's defects. Under those circumstances it is hard to understand how the bureaucracy within the department took ownership of this building.

There are plenty of other examples of such problems. They have been highlighted by the trend of the department to use dongas and Titan sheds as stations and replacement buildings. Cronyism, jobs for the mates and jobs for the mates of the mates is another serious problem within the department. Concerned, experienced and long-serving officers have raised these issues with me. They are fed up with

trying to raise serious management issues only to be ignored, or told to be quiet, or threatened for speaking out.

Management by bullying has led to enormous staff unrest. Morale has never been lower and, as I have mentioned, it is reflected in the findings of a major staff satisfaction survey and also by the disturbingly high levels of sick leave and stress leave. I know the minister is frustrated by the high staff attrition rates, but he needs to realise that nothing will improve unless he and his government tackle the underlying problems within the department and stop pretending that cash alone will fix the problems. It is really interesting that the department is charging forward, trying to overcome the problems that are endemic within the department without realising that there are serious management concerns and that they have to be fixed as soon as possible not only for Queensland but also for the wellbeing of very dedicated and concerned paramedics within the system. With those few words, I support the bills.