



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

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PUBLIC SERVICE BILL

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (2.39 pm): I rise to speak in the debate on the Public Service Bill. The Queensland Public Service exists to serve the people of Queensland. Hundreds of thousands of people perform a wide variety of challenging roles in delivering government services that make a difference to the lives of all Queenslanders. The role of public servants is essential to the wellbeing of a community, providing information and resources and delivering services that keep everybody in the community functioning at least at basic levels.

After I left school I became a public servant and was one for almost 20 years. I served in Queensland Rail from 1983 to 2004. I first started off in a local fettling gang. We used to ride down the tracks on the quad. I then transferred into a flying gang, then a bridge gang, then a concrete gang and then drove the plant machines. I finished off welding for Queensland Rail between Charters Towers and Mount Isa. We were providing a service to the community. We were keeping the trains on track in the safest way possible.

I have concerns about Queensland Rail, which provides a public service. I have concerns that Queensland Rail, with the support of this government, plans to slash 1,200 jobs from rural and regional Queensland under a new corporate structure plan known as Project Rebus. This will have monumental ramifications for rail employees, their families and rural communities. This is a true service for rural and regional Queensland. Project Rebus will have a greater impact than the rail cuts of the early nineties when the Goss government slashed 500 jobs between Townsville and Mount Isa in one swipe. We are suffering the ramifications of those cutbacks. Thriving communities have turned into ghost towns.

What is of great concern is that this government has appointed a former BHP executive as CEO of Queensland Rail to implement Project Rebus. It could slash up to 10,000 jobs in the long run. There is the potential for privatisation. The new CEO is referred to as 'the toecutter' for shutting down the BHP steelworks and putting thousands of workers out of a job.

Project Rebus is designed to see track gangs, train drivers, freight terminal workers, station masters and shunting and support staff go down like dominoes. There have also been leaks that the inland passenger service will be on the chopping block too.

Mrs Kiernan: Oh, nonsense. Stop responding to the nonsense.

Mr KNUTH: This comes from the unions. Are the unions telling lies on this? The unions are striking about this.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Charters Towers, direct your comments through the chair.

Mr KNUTH: Rebus is designed to get rid of the small freight terminals and will be the end of small freight services in rural and regional Queensland. Queensland Rail does not want small freight operations. It only wants to entertain the big mineral haulages. I call on the minister to address this issue. Queensland Rail has just stopped transporting—how is this—dangerous goods such as cyanide—

Mr MOORHEAD: I rise to a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Any discussion of Queensland Rail is entirely irrelevant to the purpose of this bill because those employees are not public servants and are not covered by the Public Service Bill. It is a government owned corporation.

Mr KNUTH: They are public servants and they are employed—

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Charters Towers, I will make my ruling, thank you very much. I have been quite lenient and I have allowed you to talk about Queensland Rail as you are referring loosely to public servants. If you could come back to the purpose of the bill we would all appreciate it.

Mr KNUTH: This is very important. We want to see a good service provided to the public. This issue is very important. This project means the closing down of these services. It will put an end to small freight service deliveries to our local shops, customers and communities and result in skyrocketing price hikes as Queensland's best freight competitor, Queensland Rail—a public service—is removed.

The government will blame competition policy but the fact is that QRNational is owned by the taxpayers of Queensland. The minister for transport and the Premier have full control to refuse to implement draconian changes with the strike of a pen. The new corporate structure—

Mr Reeves: Sit down.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Mansfield!

Mr KNUTH: The new corporate structure is about cost cutting to recover the Bligh government's \$50 billion deficit and is at the expense of rail workers, the public servants of rural and regional communities. The government should not get too arrogant with its massive majority in parliament. This same issue saw the Goss government with its 19-seat majority lose office. It received a backlash from 25,000 rail employers and their families who are public servants.

Ms Grace: That has nothing to do with the bill.

Mr KNUTH: They are public servants. They serve the public. You need to have a really good look at this.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Charters Towers, I have warned you before to direct your comments through the chair. Please do not engage in a separate argument with backbenchers. Please return to the purpose of the bill.

Mr KNUTH: I wanted to bring that matter to the attention of the House.