



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

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EINASLEIGH RIVER

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—LNP) (9.16 pm): I would like to bring to the attention of members the serious issue of the heavy flooding in the southern gulf region, which has placed multimillion-dollar industries in jeopardy and which has impacted on the lives of the many people who live in that area. I would also like to raise the issue of the little support that has been provided to the families there who have lost thousands of stock and to the communities who have suffered because their only crime is that they are isolated.

These issues could be alleviated through the construction of one decent bridge across the Einasleigh River on the Gulf Development Road. The existing bridge provides access into the gulf region and services the mining, pastoral and fishing industries, Indigenous communities and tourism. It enables food, fuel and medical supplies to be brought into towns such as Georgetown, Croydon, Normanton and Karumba and it supports the towns of Einsaleigh, Mount Surprise and Forsayth. It is time we stopped pussyfooting around and built a decent bridge. The existing bridge has been open for just four days since 1 January this year.

I fully support the Etheridge, Carpentaria, Burke and Mornington shire councils in their efforts to have this bridge replaced. While thousands of cattle have already died because of the government's failure to provide fodder drops, this problem could be alleviated if trucks carrying fodder could get closer to their destination as a result of a decent bridge on the Einsaleigh River. I back the LNP spokesman for agriculture and fisheries, Ray Hopper, who reminded this government that some families in this region have been flooded in for six weeks. They have suffered massive losses. Their cattle—those that remain alive—have suffered and those that are still alive are starving through lack of feed and lack of fodder drops. The state government needs to organise fodder drops from helicopters, to use the Army and private charter helicopters with cargo nets to drop fodder to the cattle that are stranded on the islands in flooded areas and which are still alive. The government needs to provide all the appropriate assistance that is available.

We also need to prepare for the same problem arising next year and the year after, that is, flooding and problems with access because there is only one bridge. With federal government funding through natural disaster relief arrangements and with additional funds provided by the state government, the cost of a new bridge is a pittance compared to the \$63 million that is to be spent on a footbridge across the Brisbane River. The government urgently needs to consider the needs of the industries and the communities that depend on this bridge. This issue has very little to do with how many people live in this area and everything to do with how many people are impacted by the industries that depend on the bridge. This impact reaches throughout Queensland—right down to the Treasury coffers. On behalf of all of those who live in this area, together with those who are dependent on the bridge and those who are impacted by the industries carried on in this part of Queensland, I implore the minister to take immediate action to replace the bridge over the Einsaleigh River.