



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Mr KNUTH (Dalrymple—LNP) (9.30 pm): It is with great honour that I make my first speech as a member of the 53rd Parliament of Queensland. I am a proud Australian and a proud Queenslander. As Anzac Day draws near, I would like to honour those who have fought and fallen to preserve our flag and our Constitution. By their sacrifices we have inherited freedom and prosperity to this day. These brave men and women are the true heroes of our nation. I would like to honour those who are, to this day, still fighting to safeguard the futures of people in some of most volatile nations.

I wish to acknowledge those who are most important to me. My wife, Heather, who has helped share the burden that all members and candidates endure before, during and after an election campaign. I also acknowledge my children, Anna, Joel, Daniel and Naomi, who have been a wonderful inspiration and whom I am so proud of and love dearly.

I would like to thank my electorate council chairman, Sue Bennetto, Pipi Knuth, Verna Webb and Jim Pritchard for their ongoing support year in, year out. Richard Hughes, I truly appreciate your personal support in the most southern part of the Dalrymple electorate, Moranbah. I would also like to mention the many booth workers in Charters Towers, Moranbah, Pentland, Greenvale and Ravenswood.

I would also like to acknowledge Jeff Brown, Kevin Ranke and Roy and Muriel Rankine. I make special mention of Lady Flo Bjelke-Petersen, who visited the Tablelands with her friend Lady Pearl Logan. Her influence on the Tablelands was invaluable. I would also like to thank my parliamentary colleagues who supported me during the campaign. I would also like to add my thanks to the booth workers on the Tablelands at Butcher's Creek, Dimbulah, Evelyn Central, Herberton, Innot Hot Springs, Kairi, Millaa Millaa, Mutchilba, Mount Garnet, Ravenshoe, Tolga, Walkamin and Yungaburra and all the others who helped throughout the electorate at other booths. Your support was greatly appreciated.

I am proud to represent a rural electorate. I am a rural and regional Queenslander through and through. It gives me great pleasure to get out and mix with the people who, despite great adversity, continue to work hard for their families and for this great state. The Dalrymple electorate stretches from Walkamin in the north to Moranbah in the south. The electorate is 1,000 kilometres long and covers an area of 105,000 square kilometres. It takes an average of 12 hours to travel from one end of the electorate to the other.

I have been travelling from one end of the electorate to the other for some time now and have raised in this House some of the issues that are affecting residents. In the north we face issues such as the closure of DPI research stations, the unwanted and impractical 2025 plan, the closure of the Upper Barron State School, the downgrading of our health services and the shocking state of our roads. These issues and many others are important to the residents of the north. The government must realise that it governs for all people, not just those who live in the south of the state.

There are a diverse number of industries in the electorate—the agriculture and dairy industry in the north to coalmining in the south. Each and every person has different issues and different opinions, but they are all united in their call for a separate state of North Queensland. They are tired of their hard earned tax dollars and the region's gross revenue being sunk into the south-east corner of the state and their

issues ignored and their quality of life interfered with due to the decisions made by the southern majority. As a member representing a rural electorate I am passionate about a fair go for those who live and toil in the northern part of our state. Ordinary people, from bush battlers and miners to the townspeople, farmers and cockies, are united on this. I would be happy to work with a committee to help drive this push.

The Upper Barron State School did not open this year. It is a beautiful school with scenic surrounds, including a new outdoor arena that cost tens of thousands of dollars to erect. The school was fully supported by the P&C, and the residents could not believe that their school would be closed. They were planning to celebrate a milestone—the centenary of the school—but that was never going to happen under this government, which does not appreciate the value of small schools. This was an absolutely disgraceful decision which left many families devastated. Schoolchildren are now forced to spend up to two hours a day on a school bus travelling to and from school when they have a wonderful school at their door. The LNP committed to reopen the school so that children could continue to learn in one of the most beautiful areas in Queensland. I call on the minister to visit this school and community. I believe the minister would be dismayed over the closing of this school.

Greater incentive packages need to be provided to encourage more nurses, doctors and dentists to work in regional, rural and remote areas. There is a continual high turnover of staff which puts pressure on other nursing and healthcare staff and patients. If we lose a doctor or a dentist it can take up to three to four months to find a replacement. Some people have no choice but to make an 800-kilometre round trip to get a tooth fixed.

The LNP had plans to introduce hospital boards, which would give local communities the option to prioritise services and have them returned to rural and regional hospitals. Common sense says that this would have relieved the increasing pressure on metropolitan hospitals.

Many communities in my electorate rely heavily on primary industries. It is no exaggeration to say that so many people who live in rural electorates are frustrated and angry at being gutted by a government that implements antirural policies such as the latest move to prevent the clearing of regrowth. This decision has nothing to do with science, nor has it anything to do with the environment. This decision is about a deal done with the Greens before the state election in a hope that the Labor Party would get Green preferences.

Regrowth is the rubbish that we battle to contain as it takes over good country. Regrowth is the build-up of rubbish and woody weeds that take the place of grass which holds the soil intact and stops erosion. The Victorian fire catastrophe was a result of regrowth build-up over the years that was not managed. Land management is about managing the land, sowing the good seed, producing the best crops and ensuring that the best food is on our tables.

The recently announced moratorium on clearing rubbish regrowth is another example of how little value this government places on our primary industries. These industries are predicted to be worth over \$10 billion in 2008-09. They employ in excess of 100,000 people. They have powerfully driven the economy through the downturn. It is a deep shame that the fate of rural electorates is decided by the majority of members who represent metropolitan electorates.

The Moranbah region produces billions of dollars a year in gross revenue coal. The residents of Moranbah, people who pay their fair share of tax, see all of that wealth siphoned out of their town and receive only peanuts in return. Moranbah should not be treated as just a mining town. It is a place where parents are raising their children. It is a place that people call home—a place where people are choosing to retire. Moranbah is a town that has expanded. The demand for housing far outweighs supply. I call on the government to prioritise in terms of providing the appropriate services which range from housing, aged care, medical and maternity services, support for disabilities and other essential services.

As members are aware, the city of Charters Towers has been plagued with flying foxes for the past seven years. I would like to know why the state government intervened in a Charters Towers Regional Council and CASA supported strategy to drive the flying foxes from the town using helicopters. The state government stood in and stopped the idea. Once again, the state government shows its contempt for the residents of Charters Towers who year after year have been living with the plague, the stench, the filth, the ticks, the parasites—

Mr Reeves interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Wendt): Order! Minister for Child Safety!

Mr Lawlor interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Minister for Tourism!

Mr KNUTH: They have also lived with the risks associated with continual exposure to these filthy beasts. The only thing this state government has offered the residents of Charters Towers is the threat of a \$75,000 fine for disturbing a colony of flying foxes. If you were so good you would be up there and you would take action and have the flying foxes removed. It has lasted seven years. If you were such a good government you would have had these filthy things moved seven years ago.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Dalrymple! Please do not use the word 'you'. Refer your comments through the chair.

Mr KNUTH: Sorry, Mr Deputy Speaker. If there is a death from Hendra virus or lyssavirus because of these vile creatures, this government will be held accountable.

In 2006 the Australian Railroad Group was purchased by Queensland Rail. The state government's decision to allow this purchase is the greatest catastrophe and mistake that has ever been imposed on our state rail freight network. Since ARG has taken over the Townsville to Mount Isa rail line, we have seen the transportation of dangerous goods shifted from rail to road, the end of small rail freight services and now the increased pricing of the transportation of minerals from Thalanga to Townsville, forcing Kagara Zinc to transport 100,000 tonnes of copper concentrate 200 kilometres now by road when it used to be by train.

The offer made by Queensland Rail to Kagara Zinc was 20 per cent more than road transport. This is an absolute joke and the minister needs to come clean on how transport costs by rail can be more expensive than transport costs by road. At the same time, Queensland Rail negotiated with its employees a new pay structure. However, it has now reneged on this pay structure in its attempt to force employees to sign up with this bogus ARG. This is Queensland Rail's ploy and the state government's ploy to avoid the protection of wages. Also, ARG has not implemented Queensland Rail's former policy of no forced redundancies or no forced relocations. ARG agreements only last 12 months, putting job security in jeopardy.

I call on the minister to acknowledge that the purchase of ARG and the consequent action of ARG management is merely a cover-up to create a perception that Queensland Rail and the state government are completely innocent. Queensland Rail is the parent company, yet the state government is washing its hands of draconian decision making by the bogus company ARG. I call on the government to acknowledge that this experiment to purchase this phantom company to take over the western line is a lost cause. I call on the minister to get rid of this ridiculous company and admit that this is a failure and go back to the basics where Queensland Rail managed the operation between Townsville and Mount Isa. I call on the minister to give back the services which the businesses, small and large, between Townsville and Mount Isa rightfully deserve.

Today I bring to the health minister's attention the explosive issue of a dementia ward at Eventide. This issue is one of the most heated and passionate issues I have ever faced. The Charters Towers district is not likely to slink off into the sunset on this one. During the election campaign the LNP committed \$1.5 million to have a dementia-specific unit opened at Eventide within 12 months. This commitment caused much joy and a huge sense of relief through the local area. You can imagine the pain and disappointment—even anger—I now hear from constituents as I travel around. People are desperate. They will not allow their loved ones to be taken off like some object to a place hundreds of kilometres away far from their families and friends to spend the remainder of their lives in what would seem to be like a foreign land. This is an absolutely appalling situation.

Many of these patients have lived their lives in the Charters Towers district and contributed their whole working lives to the area to become key figureheads in the community, and now they are treated as outcasts. I ask the minister what his decision would be if one of his loved ones were to be hauled off into an unknown, far away and unfamiliar place hundreds, if not thousands, of kilometres away for a round trip. I specifically invite the new health minister, Paul Lucas, to visit Charters Towers to speak to the residents about his plans for a dementia unit in the city. He would be welcomed with true country hospitality and would meet a very determined dementia and aged-care action group and supporters.

There is a rising fury against the lack of dementia support in Charters Towers, especially in view of such units in other small towns. The Pandanus unit at Eventide is well suited to such a unit. It is fenced and can be easily converted to house a dementia-specific unit. People are no longer content to wait for something to happen in the distant future. They are determined to push this one through. There is a sense of loss in the area after the idea that the dementia unit was on the way after the LNP committed to have one up and running within 12 months. I will be tabling a petition of 2,000 signatures requesting a unit to be provided at Eventide.

To finish off, as the member for Dalrymple and a representative of the people of a large and diverse electorate, I feel it is my duty to bring these issues before this House and the parliament. Often the needs of those in the bush are overlooked. There are many other issues that need to be raised, but time prohibits me mentioning them all. I will be standing up for my electorate and my intention is to continue to make those views known to this parliament and to this government.