




Speech by

Howard Hobbs

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

Hansard Thursday, 17 May 2012

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Mr HOBBS** (Warrego—LNP) (12.49 pm): It is with great pleasure that I rise to participate in the address-in-reply for the 54th Parliament of Queensland. I congratulate Madam Speaker on her appointment to the very high office of Speaker and I congratulate you too, Madam Deputy Speaker Cunningham, on your appointment. You have put many years into this parliament and I am sure you will take pleasure in the role that you have. I commit myself to work hard for the electorate of Warrego and in fact for all Queenslanders. I certainly thank the electors for having faith in me to serve another term. To the LNP branches particularly in my area who work so hard and to all the people who worked in the booths: they put in a fantastic effort and they do so on a regular basis, so I thank them from the bottom of my heart.

I have seen many changes in this place since 1986. The political cycles come and go—the wind blows one way and then the wind blows the other way. I have been three times in government and two times in opposition. There is one thing worse than being in government and that is being in opposition, and we have been there a few times. But many of us did it and we did not whinge about it. We used to always attack the government and say that what they were doing was wrong even when in many instances it was right. But at the end of the day we worked hard, we listened to people, we travelled the length and breadth of this state and we formed policies. We formed policies that from today are going to be implemented by this government. As you heard during the last election campaign, a lot of those policies were developed over many years and they have been honed and pull together philosophies that we believe will take this state forward very, very quickly.

I want to congratulate all the new members who are here in this chamber. It is a fantastic effort by everybody. It is a great privilege to be here. There are not very many of us who do get the opportunity and the privilege. Many try to come into this place but few succeed. To those who have made it, I congratulate you on the wonderful effort and the team that you have had behind you to do it.

It has been a very difficult task to pull together the LNP team. This is the first time since the National Party formed government back in the late seventies and early eighties that we actually have a government from the conservative side that is one team—the LNP—as the Premier said earlier this morning. I think it is very important to have one team. In the past we had two teams—a coalition. We have put a lot of work into this and it is important that we keep it this way—a strong, united, conservative government in this state.

The Labor record and legacy is abysmal in this state. Generations of Queenslanders will pay dearly for the debt, the forced council amalgamations, the demonising of agriculture, the demonising of landholders, the abuse of land tenure, the bureaucracy that has been foisted upon everybody and the vegetation laws that were abused. For example, landholders were taken to court and when the government lost they would appeal and the landholders were taken to court again, and when the government lost again they would appeal again and the landholders were taken to court again. The government never gave up. They used the government purse to persecute landholders.

Let me talk about water management in this state. Generally speaking, a lot of the water management plans done in this state are legal but only just. There is only one water management plan that

has been done in this state—and that is the one done for the Condamine-Balonne water management area—that I can say is accurate. The reason it is accurate is that we had a hell of a fight in that area and we ended up getting in an independent panel to peer review the water management plan, and so we ended up with a figure that is about right. But that took 15 years to get because we were blocked all the way through. People's lives have been held up. People who owned water licences and who had water entitlements could not use them. Banks have been held back and, as a result, finances have been held back all because of inaction and because they did not use the government well.

We need to change the way we do government in this state. We need to change it dramatically from what we have seen. Queensland is a resource rich state with enormous potential. We must open Queensland up for business again and those small businesses will provide the jobs and the revenue. We have to fix things like workplace health and safety. When I talk to local businesses, they say that they have been stifled in everything they do. Coming in on the Warrego Highway we now have all of these stop-go people. In fact there was one section of road I came through where there were four stop-go people and there was a one-tonne ute with a sign that said, 'Follow me,' then there was a ute behind him—I am not sure what it was doing there but it went in behind the group as the cars went by—and there was a spare ute there as well. So there were three one-tonne utes and four stop-go people for two machines on the road. How can we afford this? It is absolutely ridiculous. What is the cost of running that? If you use signs, they do not argue back, they are not paid overtime and they work 24 hours a day! It is simple. It is not rocket science. Let's make it work.

Litigation laws have to be changed. Look at what has happened in the medical field. Doctors are leaving. I had a great doctor in Dr Jim Baker. He was the famous flying surgeon based in Roma. He passed away recently. He once said to me that with every mail he opens he fears that that is the day the letter will come. He hoped that every kid that he brought into this world made it to 17 years old because then they were off his books. We cannot afford to have that. New Zealand have fixed their system—well, they have improved it—and we need to as well.

We must of course give people natural justice. We do not want to change that. We do not want to take away people's rights. But people must do the right thing. They must fix up their fences, install grids, provide access and not set traps for people. But at the end of the day we need to ensure that common sense prevails. If a sign says, 'Don't go through the door,' and you go through the door and you fall over, well whose fault is it? If you break into someone's house and you fall through the skylight, whose fault is it? Presently it is the homeowner's fault. How bad is that? We need to be able to do something about that.

We must grow agriculture. We have to have some security. It is one of our four pillars. We have to double agricultural production in this state.

My electorate of Warrego is a large one. It is the same size as Victoria. It reaches just west of Dalby and to the South Australian border.

Mr Hopper: Good neighbours.

Mr HOBBS: I have some good neighbours too. I take the interjection. I have a lot of neighbours actually. I often talk about the fact that with one more redistribution I could fish in Cooper Creek and the sea in the same electorate. But I do have some great neighbours out there and we work really well together. It is a huge area.

There are a lot of things that I want to see done in my area that I am sure other members would like to see reflected in their areas as well. Take roads for example. All our roads are bad. It is just that some are worse than others. The Warrego Highway is a good example where there is an enormous amount of traffic. There is convoy after convoy of road trains going out there now, with the biggest trucks you have ever seen in your life. Even your brothers would be jealous of the size of some of those trucks going out there, Vaughan. They are giants. We love to have them but we have to have facilities to take them. What about rail? There is a rail line that goes out there and the grass is growing over it. More freight goes by road than by rail. We used to have five freight trains a week that would go from Brisbane through to Roma and Charleville.

Mr Johnson: Quilpie.

Mr HOBBS: And to Quilpie, and now there are none. There is the Westlander twice a week. There is a perfectly good railway line there but it is not used. When we get a big wet season the grass grows over it before a train gets there. It is just ridiculous. The biggest freighters on the Warrego Highway is Queensland Rail. We have to change that and I am sure we can.


Coal seam gas, CSG, is a huge industry and one that we want, but we have to manage it better. The policies that we are going to put in place will do that. We have to give certainty to landholders. We have to be able to provide security of water—that the water that is used and extracted will not in any way be to the

detriment of our underground supplies, our Great Artesian Basin and suchlike. We have a strong policy that will resolve those issues, and we need to ensure that that is put in place sooner rather than later.

When it comes to floods, members have all heard about the floods and have all had them in different parts of their electorates. I have had a few too. Roma had three floods in two years, Mitchell was flooded again the other day and Charleville has had numerous floods. In most of those cases, particularly with Roma and Charleville, flooding of those towns is totally preventable. So we have to put in place mechanisms—and we have—to resolve those issues. While the previous government came out and were helpful at the time the flood occurred, it was disappointing that as soon as the media moved off so did they. That was it. We have to make sure that we are there for the long haul, and we can be. I will give members an example. So far it would have cost about \$100 million to fix the homes in Roma; it would cost about \$10 million for a levy bank. It is not rocket science, is it, to know what to do? And that would solve the problem entirely. That figure may vary but it is roughly that.

Debate, on motion of Mr Stevens, adjourned.

Sitting suspended from 1.00 pm to 2.00 pm.

 **Mr HOBBS** (Warrego—LNP) (5.08 pm), continuing: I am pleased to continue my speech on the address-in-reply for the 54th Parliament of Queensland. This morning I was talking about general issues that relate to Queensland and then started to cover many of the issues that are very important to me and my electorate of Warrego. A number of years ago one of the most important issues that I found needing attention was the protection of prime agricultural land. The member for Condamine and I met with landholders on the Brigalow flood plain in the Haystack Road area. Those landholders expressed to us their concern that a coalmine was going to be built right in the middle of this huge flood plain. Over many years they had spent millions of dollars trying to manage the water flows by moving fences, changing roads, changing their paddocks and changing the way they did business.

We determined at that time that we needed to protect what we called iconic farming land. It progressed from there. It goes to show that if you persevere with something eventually you get somewhere. With the great support of the local communities the previous Labor government was pushed into doing something about it. It put in place a strategic land management process which identified some of this land. It was very complicated and bureaucratic. A person had to put in an application if they wanted to determine whether they had prime agricultural land and then, for a fee, they would be told whether they did or did not have such land. It was complicated. I am pleased to say that the LNP government will protect prime agricultural land through a regional planning process that will be simpler. It will ring-fence once and for all the areas where mining and CSG cannot go or will be limited. There will also be protection in relation to how close it can be to dwellings. That is important for future mining or CSG development.

The other issue I want to talk about is the forced council amalgamations, which have caused absolute angst in those communities affected. When the government started to move towards councils being amalgamated many people throughout Queensland thought that it would make them more efficient. Generally speaking, some companies can be better when they become bigger and stronger with better buying power. But businesses are vastly different from councils. The model that was used by the Beattie government at the time was never going to work. Against all the advice that was provided by all the experts it nevertheless went down this track. Now we have ended up with this model where bureaucracy has blown right out and the finances are a mess. Council debt, members might not be aware, was about \$2 billion before amalgamation. It is now nearly \$6 billion. They say it will go to \$23 billion in the next 10 or 15 years unless some changes are put in place.

People in these council areas report that there is no coordination. It has been very hard for councillors. Their role was changed from being a councillor and knowing what is going on to being on a board of directors. I know some councillors who used to come to a meeting once a month where they were given an hour-and-a-half briefing and then sent home. The mayor and the CEO used to run the rest of it. It just did not work. When those councillors were asked about various projects going on in the shire they did not know; they had no idea of the background to it, who was doing the work or when it was going to start or finish.

I grew up in local government and was also a mayor—it was called a chairman in those days—and I knew everything about the shire. I knew who was on the job and where they were working. I had a firsthand knowledge of everything that went on. The situation has to be changed. I am pleased to say that we have a policy that will allow communities that do wish to change the boundaries, or deamalgamate or whatever one wants to call it, a chance to do that.

Mr Elmes: Hear, hear!

Mr HOBBS: The member for Noosa has been very involved with this right from the start. Noosa is the perfect example. People often say you cannot unscramble an egg and that it will cost too much money.

Mr Elmes interjected.

Mr HOBBS: Absolute bull, as the member for Noosa says. It is estimated that it will cost \$4 million to deamalgamate Noosa council. It will still have a very viable council for 50,000 people. They will have their own say. The community will be very involved in that.

I also want to talk about the Maranoa bridge. Cast your minds back to the floods we had in Mitchell. The Maranoa bridge was out of action for quite some time. Even now it is at reduced capacity. The flood virtually severed the link between Brisbane and Darwin. Suddenly people could not get their produce and materials through. It caused a great deal of anxiety. I am pleased to inform the House that the bridge is being fast-tracked for renewal. A new bridge will be built beside the other one. It will be a metre higher. It would be nice if it were higher but the trouble is if they make it too much higher it will be much higher than the lowest part of town, so the town would go under anyway. I think that will be satisfactory.

I want to touch on the coal seam gas industry. We support the industry with changes. It does bring a two-speed economy to the towns. In areas such as Chinchilla, Miles, Wandoan and Roma, those industries that are related to hospitality are doing very well. Hotels, motels, pubs, fuel stations and coffee shops do extremely well. There are many others that are suffering. They cannot get staff. To counteract that we have to make sure we do better in relation to 457 visa approvals. In Roma KFC, McDonald's and coffee shops would not operate without people on 457 visas. Many of the engineering works would not operate without these people. We cannot get Australians to work in those areas because they are tied up in the gas industry. Kids are being paid between \$70,000 and \$100,000 a year to go and work in these industries. It is a lot of money to get paid. It certainly has an impact on sawmills and other industries.

Royalties for the Regions is a very important policy that was developed over many years. I am so pleased to see that we are going to roll that out in due course. The people of Queensland will see that we are a government for all of Queensland. The Royalties for the Regions policy will be of great benefit to everybody.