




Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—KAP) (5.15 pm): It is a great honour to have been elected to the 54th Parliament. I congratulate Madam Speaker on her promotion. I do not think there is anyone in this parliament who would be able to do a more excellent job. I feel honoured also to have been elected for my fourth term. In 2004 I delivered my maiden speech after winning against a hardworking Labor member of the government to become the new member for Charters Towers. That did not come on a silver platter. I worked for five years to be endorsed by the National Party. I travelled to different areas such as Richmond, Hughenden, Alpha, Jericho, Capella, Clermont, Moranbah and so on. I went through two car motors. But that hard work saw me endorsed and I won the seat in 2004. In 2006 I was re-elected and in 2009 I saw the seat of Charters Towers abolished and the new electorate of Dalrymple created. It takes in the Atherton Tablelands and goes right through to Moranbah.

I put myself forward as a candidate for Dalrymple and overcame against the very popular sitting member, Rosa Lee Long, who inspired me with her passionate advocacy for her electorate. I am encouraged to see her elected as mayor of the Tablelands Regional Council. In 2012, when there was a massive swing to the LNP, I was again honoured to win against the LNP tidal wave. In areas such as Charters Towers there was a 40 per cent swing against the LNP.

Members of parliament are there to serve their people, yet time and time again we see and hear new members with good intentions, determined to stand up for their constituents, being bound by party politics that denies them the reason for their election. There are many battlers out there who are doing it tough, who should never be forgotten and who put us here, and we should not become 'parliamentised'—a fate suffered by many former MPs.

There are many good people for me to thank, and it would be impossible for me to mention everyone by name. However, I must mention my wonderful wife and family: Heather, Anna, Joel, Daniel and Naomi. With an electorate more than 1,000 kilometres long—it takes more than 12 hours to get from one end to the other and encompasses three major centres in the Moranbah coalfields, Charters Towers and the Atherton Tablelands—I am away from home for periods up to three weeks at a time. No doubt this takes its toll, and I express great appreciation for my family's patience and endurance.

I cannot name everyone, but I would like to mention the three branch chairpersons—Paul De Wiljes in the Charters Towers branch, Renee Kung in the Atherton branch and Russell Fry in the Malanda branch—for their support and for getting the team organised. I must also thank my electorate office staff for their loyalty and dedication and for standing strong when things have been tough.

There are many issues out there that must be addressed. For example, areas like the Atherton Tablelands produce half a billion dollars a year from agriculture, yet they have the most shocking roads in Queensland. In the Charters Towers region, bats have been flapping around us for 10 years but no government has the guts or the intestinal fortitude to make the tough decision to cull the flying foxes. The coalfields in Moranbah produce \$6 billion in gross revenue; however, very little has been spent to provide affordable family accommodation and everywhere we look there are MAC camps going up like there is no tomorrow.

The fly-in fly-out saga has left towns, businesses and families torn apart. Weekly rents in Moranbah are now up to \$3,800 a week. Unfortunately, a MAC camp has now been approved by the ULDA that will cater for more than 3,000 single-men quarters. This land should be available to provide affordable accommodation for families. It has to be acknowledged that Moranbah is a town where families are raising their children. It is where grandparents are retiring. It is a place they call home and it should not be considered a mining town to rake money into the state Treasury coffers. We need to invest in infrastructure. We need to put mining royalties back into those regions. We need to ensure that Moranbah is a place where people can retire, not a place full of MAC camps. It was once a family oriented community where children could walk the streets and where children played sport. This culture has completely changed as a result of the massive fly-in fly-out workforce and all of these MAC camps going up everywhere. This has to be addressed.

I raise the issue of flying foxes. As some members know, this has been a 12-year problem in Charters Towers. No people on this earth should have to put up year in and year out with the filth, the stench, the ticks, the parasites and the serious virus risks as a result of these filthy creatures that live amongst us day in and day out. Flying foxes are vermin. Some 12 years ago people never had a problem or issue with flying foxes, but when we have governments that refuse to take action and impose fines of up to \$100,000 and jail sentences as a result of wanting to move these pests and vermin on something is wrong with our society. This is a very important issue. We have had a change of government and I do not want to have to come into this parliament and bring this issue up ever again. We must do something about it.

We have used helicopters, smoke and noise to move flying foxes on. Members must understand that Charters Towers is an area which has a lot of mango, fig and lychee trees. Using noise and smoke to move these flying foxes on means that all we are doing is pushing those bats from one part of the city to another residential area. The bats must be culled so that they recognise that places like Charters Towers are not nice, welcome places. We must also change the flight paths of the bats in terms of where they go to feed. For years they have been protected and looked after by governments, so the bats have a flight path where they know they can feed safely. We must bring in culling so that we can change the course of where the bats go so if they go to a residential area they will be culled and they will come to know that it is not a nice place to go. We should have the same rules around horses where they have the potential to spread Hendra virus.

I bring this to the attention of the House because it is a very passionate issue. I hope the minister takes that on board—that is, we can use noise, helicopters and all of these things but flying foxes will return. We must use something that is effective. We must use something that puts the quality of life of people before vermin. I say that to the minister, and I hope he can do it. If what he allows us to do does move the bats on, I will congratulate the minister and thank him and Campbell Newman for it. Likewise, if the federal Labor Party does so as well, I will thank it. This is not about being political; this is about a member of parliament who has lived with this filth for years year in and year out and it has to be dealt with. I hope we have the intestinal fortitude to do something to get rid of them full stop.


I turn to the issue of ERMPs, which were imposed upon us by the previous Labor government. The LNP said that it did not support them and that they would be virtually thrown out, but they still exist. Graziers want to know about the future of these ERMPs that have been thrust upon them. Those in the grazing community have properties that are 200,000 square acres. For those graziers to be asked to take pictures, fill out forms and come back five years later to show what they have done and improved on their properties of such massive size does nothing in relation to protecting the Great Barrier Reef. All it does is place a burden on those people. It is an absolute insult for a \$30,000 fine to be imposed on our primary producers if they do not fill the forms out properly and for them to be threatened with jail sentences if they do not do it at all. These ERMPs must go in order to let farmers be farmers and graziers be graziers without being hit with all of these different restrictions and fines. It is just like the bats in that there is a \$100,000 fine if someone disturbs a colony of flying foxes. The \$30,000 fine for farmers who make a bad mistake and the threat of a jail sentence if they do not fill out the forms at all must go.

I turn now to the dairy industry in my electorate. Deregulation was introduced by both the Labor state government and the federal Liberal government. Before deregulation there were 260 dairy farmers on the Tablelands. After deregulation there are now 62. Before deregulation the price of milk was 59c a litre. After deregulation it was 39c a litre. We have to support our dairy industry on the Tablelands, and remember when we used to see the rolling green pastures, the beautiful mists and the lovely milk that that produced. That need is still the same, but we will not have a dairy industry. We have to forget about the market economy, deregulation and competition. Instead, we have to take the bull by the horns and bring in a compulsory arbitrator to negotiate farm gate prices between the factory, the farmer and the retailer. We need to bring in quotas of how much milk comes into this state. We need to ensure that we back our farmers, because I can guarantee that if we do not do anything now we will see the collapse of a great industry and, because everyone wants fresh milk, we will be importing milk. If that happens, we will see the end of jobs and the end of that industry.

It is important to acknowledge that the Atherton Tablelands produces half a billion dollars of gross revenue in agriculture alone and yet it has the poorest, most pathetic roads in history known to man. The Nettle Creek Bridge is a low-lying bridge at Innot Hot Springs. This bridge was first put in place in the 1920s, but that bridge closes down an entire inland highway when it rains—an inland highway that enables the movement of produce from south to north. With just a drop of rain that bridge floods and it blocks an entire highway from south to north. It needs to be upgraded and lifted about five or six metres and that problem will be resolved once and for all.

I turn to an issue with regard to the Alpha Coal rail project which the government has fast-tracked without appropriate consultation with many of the farmers in those areas. The state government has an open-door policy to mining companies wanting to run rail corridors from the Galilee Basin through prime agricultural land to Abbot Point. However, before the election the LNP put its hand on its heart and promised landowners that there would be proper community consultation before any rail corridors were approved. Since the election, Gina Rinehart and Clive Palmer now have an open door to the government but landowners have been given the cold shoulder. The landowners lobby group, Corridor to Coast, has made numerous submissions to the previous government and the LNP, but it has not heard from the LNP since the election. Landowners are disappointed that the state government has turned its back on those affected communities. Landowners have also tried to contact their LNP representatives, but it is evident that the LNP is avoiding them. The LNP promised a regional plan, including an integrated transport network. This approval has been so rushed that the Premier cannot say if this is even the government's preferred single rail corridor. Landowners deserve to know what the government intends to do so that they can plan a future for their businesses and their families. Landowners are also hoping that members of the government get on the phone and give them a call, which is very simple.

Water pricing is a big issue in my electorate. I will be pushing very strongly to ensure that our water assets are not sold off and are returned to public ownership. I would also like to see SunWater abolished because it is just a profit-making organisation. If we want food production to double within the next 40 years, we need to ensure that we have farmers. If we do not do something about water prices now we will not have farmers. So that is why it is such an imperative that we ensure that the farmers are receiving water at cost price. The QCA pricing recommendations for SunWater have been slammed by industry groups and irrigators alike. I hope the government will acknowledge that any increase above the current prices are unsustainable for irrigators to remain viable in a competitive market. They want to see water prices frozen. The government needs to review the terms of reference for water pricing and review the current SunWater business model. At present, the irrigators are fearful of an increase in water prices. They are not happy with the terms of reference.

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—KAP) (7.41 pm), continuing: I also bring to the attention of the House the deep concerns brought to me over the last year by parents of the Isolated Children's Parents Association who are struggling to implement the new national curriculum for their children who are studying on a School of Distance Education program. For over 40 years the ICPA has created numerous educational opportunities for families and children from rural backgrounds. However, the all-digital requirement is causing angst in many families whose internet capacity is sometimes not up to the task, especially if more than one student is using the system at the same time. It is appalling that these problems, especially for students on a School of Distance Education program, were not foreseen before lessons hit the deck. I am deeply concerned about the negative impact on some families, tutors and students who are struggling to cope with the demands of running a property, battling with inadequate internet access, organising their children's school work program and trying to understand the whole thing themselves. For some families the joy of education is fast becoming a nightmare of gigantic proportions. Education is the foundation of the future and the backbone of opportunities which put rural children on the same footing as children in the city. Rural children are obliged to use an all-digital program and it is imperative that there are no obstacles to their education.

I also bring to the attention of the House the Herberton historical museum. Looking at the Tablelands in general, there is very little in the way of industry besides the agriculture industry, and towns like Herberton need to be supported to keep communities like that alive. I tabled a petition last year on behalf of the Herberton community about the expansion of the Herberton historical museum. It was looking to purchase a part of that museum which is leasehold and turn it into freehold to give it security. However, it was agreed that the department would freehold it but DERM is asking for over \$240,000 for that conversion. I bring this to the minister's attention because we have been contacting his office for an appointment on behalf of the museum to get action in this regard, because it is a wonderful facility. There is history going back 120 years. It is important for that museum to expand, but there is a cut-off date in July when the negotiations in terms of the agreement for converting it to freehold runs out. We need to get the ball rolling and get an agreement in place, but \$240,000 or \$250,000 is too much money. That community is asking for a fair outcome because that land will never be used for anything else but the museum, but the community has been kicked in the guts in terms of the price. That needs to be addressed.

The Atherton chemotherapy unit is a wonderful facility, but for some reason or other chemo patients are pushed to use the Cairns oncology unit. Chemo patients from Atherton have to go down the mountain to get treatment when they are as sick as a dog and then travel back up the range when there is a unit in Atherton. This situation needs to be addressed so that those patients can stay in Atherton and there is less pressure on the road, less pressure on the families and less pressure on the patient. That is a very simple process.

Shovel and Gardner creeks are in a low-lying area 70 kilometres west of Charters Towers. Shadow ministers and ministers have visited the area to look at these creeks, but for the last 100 years nothing has been done to them. It only takes a drop of rain and all of a sudden the western minerals province is blocked off, causing industries to virtually shut down because of one low-lying area—that is, Shovel and Gardner creeks. It needs to be lifted about 1½ metres and that problem will be resolved. If nothing is done, as I said, it will continue to shut down the whole western minerals province.

I turn now to the Gregory Developmental Road. When Cyclone Yasi hit, the Bruce Highway was cut on and off for 2½ weeks. There is an inland highway in the Gregory Developmental Road. Areas such as Fletcher Creek, the Basalt River, the Clarke River and Snake Creek are low-lying areas, but if they are lifted a metre we would then have an inland highway right through to Melbourne. I wanted to bring those issues to the attention of the House.