




Speech by

Tim Mulherin

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

Hansard Tuesday, 21 August 2012

RURAL AND REGIONAL QUEENSLAND

 **Mr MULHERIN** (Mackay—ALP) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (12.01 pm): As a member of this parliament representing a regional electorate, I am particularly interested in the impacts of government decisions on people outside the south-east corner. Sadly, it appears that my concerns are not shared by most of the regional members of the Liberal National Party. Ever since the Newman government came to power, we have witnessed an alarming lack of consideration for Queenslanders in regional and rural areas. This month alone we have seen threats to regional services with suggestions that courthouses in regional areas will be closed. There are courthouses in centres such as Atherton, Proserpine, Sarina, Yeppoon, Gatton, Pittsworth and Tully that could be on the Newman government's hit list. Of course, we have heard the Attorney-General say that these closures will not go ahead; however, we also know that he previously said that they were not even being considered, and leaked documents from his own department showing that his statements were misleading at best and downright untruthful at worst. The Attorney-General, the man who reintroduced 'lying to parliament' laws, has shown that you simply cannot trust what this government says.

There are also concerns amongst staff within the State Reporting Bureau that more than 200 jobs will be outsourced by this callous and cold-hearted government. These court-reporting staff are located not just here in Brisbane but also in many regional areas such as Cairns, Townsville and Rockhampton.

It appears that the member for Ashgrove is more interested in being Premier of Brisbane than Premier of Queensland. We should never forget that Premier Newman's first, and so far only, major infrastructure announcement was for a flash new executive building for himself and his ministers here in the Brisbane CBD.

Just five months after being elected, the Newman government is not listening to regional communities. In Saturday's *Daily Mercury* it is reported that the mayor of Mackay Regional Council, Councillor Deirdre Comerford, after meeting with officials from the department of infrastructure, stated that the government has no intentions of developing a regional infrastructure plan for the Mackay-Whitsunday-Isaac region but that its focus will be in the Toowoomba and south-east parts of the state.

Another clear example of the Newman government's failing is its handling of the closure of the Darling Downs Correctional Centre. It is clear that the Brisbane-centric Newman government is slashing and burning services in regional communities across our state with no concern for the human cost. The Toowoomba Regional Council has been justifiably concerned about the impacts of the abrupt closure of the jail, a decision that was announced with no consultation. These are front-line jobs and services that have been axed, yet community safety minister Jack Dempsey refuses to meet with the local council and fails to respond to genuine questions from the council.

What is even more surprising is that the members for Toowoomba South, Toowoomba North and Southern Downs are silent on this matter—not a backbone amongst them. At least the member for Gregory has had the temerity to speak out about the Newman government's program of savage cuts to jobs and front-line services. He told ABC Radio last week that cuts to the Emerald office of the Department of Transport and Main Roads would happen 'over my dead body'. And the member for Gregory has had

some advice for all first-time LNP members in this chamber—that it is a local MP's role to stand up for local jobs, that it is what we are elected to do. In fact, a constituent sent me an email praising the member for Gregory for standing up and criticising the members for Burdekin, Mirani and Whitsunday for not standing up for local public servants, local jobs and the local services that they provide.

At least the member for Gregory recognises the huge impact that job losses have in regional communities. Unfortunately, there are dozens of other LNP members who sit in this chamber in silence while the Brisbane-centric Newman government takes jobs and services away from their local communities. The challenge for all LNP members in this chamber, particularly those representing regional areas, is to break their vow of silence and find their voice. They should be standing up for their communities and letting the Premier and Treasurer know in no uncertain terms that their slash-and-burn approach is just not acceptable.