




Speech By
Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE

QUEENSLAND RAIL TRANSIT AUTHORITY BILL

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—KAP) (2.31 pm): In rising to speak to the Queensland Rail Transit Authority Bill 2013, I will quote from the explanatory notes, which state—

1. Establishing a new statutory authority (the Queensland Rail Transit Authority (QRTA)). The QRTA will be incorporated. The QRTA will have a Board which will prepare both strategic and operational plans for ministerial approval.

The explanatory notes also state—

Fiscal challenges whereby budget funds are limited and the requirement to substantially increase capital investment in new transport infrastructure is evident, meaning Government must explore new ways to deliver enhanced service levels, new innovations and greater cost efficiency. This includes reviewing the capability within the current organisational structure to drive cost reduction initiatives through improved productivity, efficiency and effectiveness.

The government sees this as some form of initiative to return Queensland Rail back to public ownership. Many of our assets that have been sold were run very effectively and efficiently under the public ownership system of operation. The minister in his second reading speech mentioned that there will be boards in Queensland Rail. This is a concern because the local health boards were there to fight powerfully for their regions, whereas local hospital boards operate under the government's criteria. If you want to sack health workers in the region then the board will do it and the board will be blamed. It is back to front, because the board was there to fight for the services of the region, not to be the government's puppet.

Queensland Rail is a great Queensland icon. It was built by hardworking Queenslanders. It is more than 150 years old. It employed more than 26,000 employees in the 1990s. It was a great employer of Aboriginals, Torres Strait Islanders and South Sea Islanders. It provided jobs for Queenslanders year in, year out, day in, day out. The flow-on effects of the railway impacted many communities. For example, there was a railway station in nearly every small country town. But when railway stations closed down, which happened in the nineties under the Goss government, you would lose the stationmaster, the assistant stationmaster and the porter. Then all of a sudden the track gang would also be removed. Then the truck driver who picked up the goods who serviced that region would be gone. Then the families of those railway employees—

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr KNUTH: Yes, that is right. Those children had attended a school, there was a shop and those communities at times had a local football team. As all the railway stations in these small country towns were removed, we started to see these small towns wiped out—Nelia, Nonda, Maxwelton and Torrens Creek. Torrens Creek had a football team as a result of Queensland Rail employees. Then we started to see the trucking yards picked up and the rail sold. So the landowners never had an area to unload their cattle onto the train to be transferred either to the meatworks or the saleyards. This in itself has been removed.

Likewise, on the Townsville to Mount Isa line there is no rail freight service. There is a massive minerals province in Western Queensland that is being serviced, and there is no freight service on that line. In reading about the budget funds and the challenges and returning it more or less to a

public entity, I cannot see that this bill is about providing or returning those services back to rural and regional Queensland for public ownership. This is about supporting in some way the big corporates. When I see that the Mount Isa line is to be packaged and rolled into the ports and leased or possibly privatised, I wonder whether they asked those communities and those employees about their jobs, their livelihoods and the consequences of what will happen to the small rural communities on that line.

I am not a supporter of corporatisation. It is the first step to privatisation. I do not know what you call this when you lease something out to a port and then possibly package it for privatisation. I do not know what you call this, but this is not returning it to public ownership. This is not giving it back to the community. This is preparing it to be packaged and to be outsourced and to get rid of the employees. This is something they have fought. They have conditions where there are no forced redundancies and no forced relocations. These are conditions that these employees have fought for and voted for in good faith over these years. This is what is going to be removed under this bill and under this process that we have in front of us.

I can see no real benefits. If we could see that it was going to be returned to public ownership, if we could see that these services were going to provide a benefit for Queenslanders in the return of royalties from the rail freight services from Mount Isa to Townsville, if we could see that there will be benefits to these employees, this would be something worth supporting, but this is working back-to-front. I see the legislation in front of me. The minister is trying to set the perception that this legislation is based on good intentions, but what we are dealing with is completely contrary to what the bill is supposed to be about. It is sad. Before the member for Ipswich West was elected he was a passionate advocate—he would fight tooth and nail—for Queensland Rail employees.

Mr Symes interjected.

Mr KNUTH: Yes, I have noticed. This government has just sacked 20 employees in the member for Ipswich West's electorate. And what has he said? 'This is good. I back the LNP. Trust us. Stick with us and you will never go hungry again.' He should be fighting tooth and nail for his employees, fighting for their job, fighting for these conditions. What is he doing? He is just rolling over.

Mr Johnson interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Cunningham): Order! Member for Gregory! Order!

Mr KNUTH: It is a disappointment having to tell those railway employees from Townsville to Mount Isa that they do not have a job; it is going to be outsourced. But you did not ask them about their job, did you? Did you talk to them about their jobs, outsourcing and selling to the ports?

An honourable member: No!

Mr KNUTH: Absolutely!

Mr Johnson: You don't know what you are talking about.

Mr KNUTH: Yes, I do know what I am talking about because this is exactly what it says. So the member for Gregory should go and talk to them.

I am hoping that the member for Ipswich West will take a stand for his electorate, take a stand for railway employees, take a stand and fight for railway people rather than dodging, weaving and hiding to the point of being invisible and, likewise, the member for Gregory. He used to walk up to the railway tracks and talk to the employees. Shame on you!

Mr JOHNSON: I rise to a point of order. I find those remarks made by the member for Dalrymple offensive. Nobody in this House has fought harder than I have for railway workers and I ask him to withdraw.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Dalrymple, the member for Gregory finds your comment offensive and I ask you to withdraw.

Mr KNUTH: I do find it very offensive. I do take that back.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Dalrymple, you need to withdraw the comment that the member for Gregory—

Mr KNUTH: I withdraw the comment and I apologise to the member for Gregory. I do admit that he did his best while he was a minister in fighting for those rail employees, but it is a different system of government now. Now it is the Liberal National Party and it is about privatisation. It is about sacking employees. They have already sacked 14,000 workers and outsourced job after job. Yes, the member for Gregory was right: he did fight back in 1995. But this is—

(Time expired)