




Speech By
Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

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ADJOURNMENT

Edmonton Land Sale

 **Mr PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (12.37 am): The Newman government considers 20 hectares of strategic health land at Edmonton as surplus to requirements. This decision to sell off this public asset is short-sighted and it has angered local residents. After Cyclone Yasi there was a public outcry for a secondary facility if Cairns Hospital ever again needed to be evacuated to avoid a repeat of a temporary operating theatre in a sports hall. This was heard by me loud and clear. Labor's decision to compulsorily acquire land at Mann's Farm took into consideration flood levels, regional growth, proximity to future public transport corridor, the 30-year Bruce Highway upgrade master plan and ability to operate during a cyclone. It was adjacent to the proposed Edmonton town centre, close to the GP super clinic and the Edmonton Leisure Centre which is also a cyclone shelter for the southern corridor. In a meeting late last year, Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service Chair Bob Norman said the land was surplus because it was too big. Three months passed and neither Mr Norman nor the Minister for Health said anything. The public would have been none the wiser if I had not released this information via the media.

In response, Mr Norman said additional medical facilities were not needed until the region had more than 400,000 people. He said the government, as if to suggest the current government, has built a nearly half-billion dollar extension to the Cairns Hospital which will meet future needs and made a point of saying the Edmonton land was acquired by the former government.

However, it was the former government that thought strategically enough to upgrade the existing Cairns Hospital, as well as acquire the land for obvious growth in the southern corridor. The decision was right then and it is still right today. Mr Norman indicated that the board may be interested in a smaller, alternative site. This raises questions about what criteria were used to abandon the existing land, besides 'it's too big'. And how hard did the HHS look at how best to use the existing land before looking elsewhere?

It all made sense when I was advised that, at a Cairns health forum in 2011, the LNP candidate for Mulgrave said that a new hospital is needed as the present one is unsafe and that it should be built on the eastern side of the Bruce Highway. This recently announced change of heart when it came to the Edmonton health land was seen by most as a new position, but clearly it was the LNP's plan all along. The current site was selected because there was sufficient land for greenfield development, a helipad and future expansion.

If this smaller land is on the eastern side of the highway and not the western side, it would require big changes to agreed existing road and public transport planning. I have seen no rigour applied in this decision-making process. People are rightly asking why an alternative site is better than one right in the middle of where people live, where people go to school, that is already owned by the state government and that is designated for health use.

With this decision, under the LNP government we in the southern corridor of Cairns are further away than ever from such a facility on this health land. I will be asking southern corridor residents to sign a petition to let this arrogant government know what a retrograde decision this really is.