



Speech By  
**Dale Last**


**MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN**

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**PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT**

**Pit Pony Project**

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (3.10 pm): I rise to inform the House of the magnificent Pit Pony Project in Collinsville. Here is a town that is on its knees, yet through the sheer determination and hard work of Collinsville Connect coordinator, Sue Clark, and Jenn Honnery, a communications and information designer based in Bowen, \$150,000 has been raised in just 60 days for this project. The Collinsville Pit Pony Project will centre on the construction of one life-size pit pony. Moulded from cast bronze, the pit pony will be a long-lasting, child-friendly monument displaying the strong community spirit in Collinsville.

In addition to the pit pony sculpture, three selfie walls will be constructed about the town. Located to encourage a tourist trail through the town, the walls will detail scenes of the pit ponies and miners at work and will be designed to allow tourists to take photos of themselves in situ. The trail will finish at the No. 1 State Tunnel model where visitors can learn about the Collinsville mine disaster and proceed to visit the coal face.

The Pit Pony Project 2015 represents 25 years since the last pit ponies, Warrior and Mr Ed, retired in Australia. The story of the miners of Collinsville and their pit ponies remains fresh in the memory of locals and as the town struggles with the slowing coal industry the question is now being asked does this rich history hold the key to the future in reigniting community spirit and offering up new hopes in terms of tourism.

The partnership between miner and pit pony began with the commencement of coal mining in Collinsville in 1921. Horses were used below ground to haul coal to the surface and on the long journey above ground to deliver the coal to port. Despite their name, the Collinsville pit ponies were typically Clydesdale horses renowned for their strength and being able to work efficiently in the larger mine tunnels. During their working life these pit ponies formed strong bonds with their handlers and other miners around them. Their even temperament made them suitable for the never-ending darkness and loud noises, while their superior intelligence ensured they never endured a heavy load and always found unguarded cribs to munch on.

By 1987 machinery underground had assumed many of the pit ponies' tasks and mine management in Collinsville was eager to retire the ponies. In 1990, however, it became clear to miners and management that the era of the pit pony had passed and the final two ponies were retired, living out their final days on a nearby grazing property in the care of previous handler, Bill Hoffman. Twenty-five years on, and as Collinsville looks to the future, the Pit Pony Project celebrates the end of that era and the memory of the mateship between miner and horse and will also establish Collinsville as a significant North Queensland tourist destination, an historic town brimming with rich stories of the past. In short, Collinsville wants to become famous as the pit pony capital of Australia.