




Speech By
Hon. Bill Byrne

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

Record of Proceedings, 23 February 2016

MOTION: NORTHERN AUSTRALIA INFRASTRUCTURE FACILITY

 **Hon. WS BYRNE** (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services and Minister for Corrective Services) (6.16 pm): I rise to speak in support of the motion before the House this evening, but I would have to say that it is not with some new sense of harmony and purpose with the opposition. From what I have heard this evening, it is pretty clear that the Palaszczuk government has a much better relationship with the federal coalition government than do our opponents across the chamber. It is clearly evident to me that we can have a sensible conversation with the federal government about Northern Australia, we can have a sensible discussion with their ministers—and I have had quite a few myself, particularly with Barnaby Joyce and Senator Canavan, and I will reflect on that in a moment.

The Palaszczuk government has been completely supportive of the initiative that has been put forward in the federal arena in terms of the development of Northern Australia.

An opposition member interjected.

Mr BYRNE: That is a fact. Central Queensland is particularly supportive of it, because we are part of the Northern Australia plan. That is why this government's language has always been encouraging. We are not out there playing the games and emotive nonsense that the opposition is playing. The Newman government's record on North Queensland and remote and regional Queensland was appalling. I will give members an example from my previous portfolio. There was a 26 per cent cut to Biosecurity Queensland. In many ways, Biosecurity Queensland is the centre of gravity of our agricultural industry and the opposition decided to knock 26 per cent out of it—slash it to the ground. That is really what it was about in North Queensland and regional and remote Queensland. That is the LNP's record in government: job cuts.

I will give members another example. The biggest setback in my city of Rockhampton was not caused by a cyclone or a flood; it was the Public Service cuts and the loss of thousands of jobs across my city on the back of a downturn in the mining industry—all thanks to those opposite. So I will not listen to the opposition members talking about their brilliance in terms of job creation or their sensitivity to regional and remote Queensland or North Queensland. It is complete nonsense.

In fact, earlier, when I had the portfolio responsibility for agriculture, I had to hold a public forum in Longreach. I might add that not one member from the opposition was there—not a single member. But Senator Barry O'Sullivan was present. Barry said to the audience, 'The job cuts out here from the Newman government have been absolutely devastating.' He said that publicly. I will not say that he said that to an audience of Socialist Left faction members sitting in a tent at Longreach, but I will say that he said that to a bunch of normal, hardworking Queenslanders in Western Queensland and they all nodded wisely to Barry. Barry O'Sullivan made that point. That is what happened to all of the services in regional Queensland. The same message has been repeated over and over everywhere that I have travelled.

The motion calls on the federal coalition to do something proactive and concrete about North Queensland. Unfortunately, despite our cooperation, what we have seen is a lot of hot air, a lot of words, a lot of flights, a lot of talking—'I'm fighting for this project; I'm doing that'—but soon the rubber will hit the road for the federal coalition and when it does not deliver or uses mealy-mouthed words around it this will come home to roost for not only the federal coalition but also the opposition. They have been building an expectation about their intentions for a long time. We have tried to work with them. There have been no disagreements in meetings I have been involved in—no friction, no animosity, no aggression. It has been a sensible, mature, adult discussion about how we can move the merits of various proposals forward to advantage all Queenslanders, not short-term opportunism.

The Premier reflected on the conversation that we had in Rockhampton last Saturday. That conversation had no friction, no animosity, none of the nonsense that we have seen from Senator Macdonald in the *Townsville Bulletin*. It was a conversation of like minds, with agreement about what we should be doing. I congratulate Senator Canavan. Although I do remember that on his first day of being sworn in his first announcement was that he wanted to split Queensland in half and divide the state down the middle, I think he has probably matured a bit since then.

I want to close with these points: we support the motion. We are working realistically and practically with the federal government to advance the interests of all Queenslanders. It is desperately disingenuous and shallow for the opposition to move this motion for pure short-term opportunistic pleasure.