




Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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ADJOURNMENT

Burdekin Electorate

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (8.09 pm): As the member for Burdekin, I could not be prouder of the electorate that I represent, and that includes the new communities that I picked up as part of the electoral redistribution—communities such as Glenden, Nebo, Moranbah, Dysart Middlemount and Clermont. Many of these communities—and I want to include Bowen and Collinsville in the mix—have experienced some of their most challenging times in recent years. Adding to that challenge is the increasing difficulty in providing high-quality child care, educators and programs for our children.

If one were to ask what the future of these communities is, where would one start? For me it starts right back at the provision of day care and kindergarten services. That is what I want to highlight in the chamber tonight. The Creche and Kindergarten Association of Queensland, along with a mix of private and community organisations, provides kindergarten and preschool services to three- and four-year-olds across the state. This is supplemented in some remote locations with an e-kindy program. Unfortunately, in some of my rural communities access to a kindergarten is unable to be provided, and therein lies the problem. Without access to kindergarten many parents are making the decision to leave these communities, which only adds to the population drain from our rural communities.

Let me give members some examples. At Nebo people can only access a pre-prep program run by the school. At Collinsville, despite numerous efforts, the community cannot find a kindergarten director, putting at risk the entire kindergarten program for that community. At Moranbah one of the kindergartens has closed, resulting in waiting lists at the remaining kindergartens in town and putting added pressure on families.

I recently raised these challenges at the Queensland Country Press Association awards conference because I wanted to highlight the looming disaster for some of our rural communities. I am passionate about growing our rural towns. I am passionate about attracting families back to the bush. If we cannot provide the necessary services we will never get past first base. Those services start right back with our children and the education and support we both offer and deliver in these communities. How can we expect families to relocate to the bush if we cannot provide even the most basic services such as childcare or kindergarten services?

The addition of one or two families can make an enormous difference in many of these communities. We need to be doing everything we can to attract more families to the bush, where they can enjoy the lifestyle and everything that growing up in a rural town can provide.

It is easy to forget that the services and resources available in our metropolitan areas, that we take for granted, are not necessarily available in our country areas. I believe that, as members of parliament, each and every one of us has an obligation to commit to equality in education across our state. We owe it to our children and to the parents who make the decision to live and work in our rural towns.