



Speech By
Tim Nicholls

MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

Record of Proceedings, 15 February 2017

MOTION

Military Training Areas

 **Mr NICHOLLS** (Clayfield—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (5.11 pm): I move—

That all the words after 'House' be deleted and the following words inserted:

'acknowledges the strong and effective representation undertaken by LNP members that ensured that the rights of Queensland graziers, landowners, meatworkers and small businesses in and around Rockhampton and Charters Towers were protected and that no landowner would be forced to sell their land to the federal Department of Defence.'

I have listened with some interest to the comments made by the member for Rockhampton—the 'member for jumping on the bandwagon' as he might otherwise be known in respect of this matter. This was a matter that was brought to the attention of the LNP last year by the member for Hinchinbrook, the member for Whitsunday and the member for Burdekin who were all alert to this issue. They had been contacted by people who were concerned about the impact of the potential acquisition of land for the Australian Defence Force—I know the member for Rockhampton cannot help it when he says it is for the Singaporeans, but let us be clear that it is for the Australian Defence Force—to be able to carry out manoeuvres on their land.

When those representations were known and when those concerns were known, members started making representations. They made them locally to the defence forces in the towns where they were concerned and they also made them to the federal members, as is the normal course of events. It is a federal issue. You would expect that the first port of call would not to be alarmist, not to jump up and down and grab all the TV space you possibly can because you know your vote is going over the edge of a cliff in Rockhampton. The \$200 million for a prison will not be enough. A week of cabinet being up there will not be enough. You have to look for some other issue to save your bacon when you are the member for Rockhampton and things are not working out so well.

We know that the motivation of the member for Rockhampton—and he probably did learn it in the army—is self-preservation. One other thing we know is that there are no atheists in foxholes. We know that as well. He became a believer. The only other person who became a believer is the Premier of Queensland. She stood up and said, 'We want Pauline Hanson to help us.' Do members remember that? Perhaps she rang up Evan and asked for the phone number. Bereft of any ideas of her own, bereft of any other ability to make a difference, they stand up and make a scene and put themselves front and centre of it.

The Shoalwater Bay issue and that of Harvey Range in North Queensland and Central Queensland are clear examples of effective action by the LNP to protect the interests of Queensland graziers when this lazy Labor government would not. It was the LNP that was prepared to stand up and make it clear to our federal colleagues that the defence department had dropped the ball on this issue. Clearly, the defence department had dropped the ball on this issue. It was a cack-handed attempt. The letters sent out that contained the implication that there would be compulsory acquisitions should not

have been sent out. If that was not the intention, if that was not what they were going to do, it should not have happened. It is all too easy for the mandarins in Canberra to make a decision to issue letters and then to say, 'Hang on a second, it is not our problem. We will let those poor people wherever they might be in the country deal with the issues.' I made the point abundantly clear in all my comments that the defence department had badly handled this issue.

It was as a result of increasing concern after discussions with both state LNP members and federal LNP members that I sent a message to the Prime Minister asking that he immediately intervene in the acquisition of rural properties in Central and Northern Queensland. I sent that message to him. I did not call out and say, 'Pauline, please save me.' It was not a matter of traipsing up and down the countryside in futile self-aggrandisement; it was about taking effective action. I spoke to the Prime Minister on Monday night and I informed him of the difficulties that people were facing and the way that the defence department had handled the matter. I asked him to immediately intervene in the matter and to take steps to ensure that proper process was followed; that the defence department did not leave the matter in the hands of bureaucrats; and that Queensland graziers, landowners and businesses were not put in the situation it looked like they were facing.

There was equally a need to preserve the business opportunities that come from the investment. There were many businesses which said, 'We need this. We want this. We are not getting anything out of state Labor. We are not seeing any action. We need this money. We need this investment in the region. We want to see jobs here.' I have spoken to mayors and councillors who were adamant that this still needed to go ahead. It needed to go ahead in the right way, with the right process and without any landowner being forced to sell their land should they not wish to. I made that point particularly clear to the Prime Minister.

It was in that week after I spoke with the Prime Minister and made a number of statements about that that we were able to see a resolution of the matter that worked in the best interests of landowners and the local community. That is what proper and effective representation is about. It is about making sure that people who can make a decision or influence a decision are aware of the problems. It is about raising it to the level where someone will do something about it. Then it is about coming up with a solution and a solution that is working, and that is exactly what happened. It was as a result of those representations and after a lot of hard work by the member for Nanango, the member for Burdekin, the member for Hinchinbrook, the member for Whitsunday and federal member Michelle Landry that this matter was absolutely resolved.

Mr Byrne: There was only one public statement.

Mr NICHOLLS: I hear the member for Rockhampton saying 'only one public statement'. The member for Rockhampton measures his success by the number of public statements, not by the effectiveness of what he actually achieves. It is no wonder the people in the agricultural industry in Queensland scratch their heads—because all they get is statements out of this government, not action. He has just confirmed what we were saying three hours ago—that they do their very best to say as much as they can but they do little to effectively drive results.

I did have a discussion with the Prime Minister, and it was a forceful discussion. It was about the fact that it is important to maintain good relations with Singapore. That is important—the member for Rockhampton notwithstanding—but that did not excuse the confused, muddled mess the defence department had made of their dealings with hardworking grazing families. Let us not forget the role the then federal government played in bringing North Queensland's cattle industry to its knees with its 2011 live cattle export ban that shut down a critical market. It shut them down. The government members here can talk about the uncertainty—and it was bad—but when it comes to the cattle industry, that party over there stands condemned for taking the backbone out of the cattle industry. The same fellow who was advising Joe Ludwig was advising that fellow over there when he got into government. We remember him, and it is the same piece of brilliant advice. When it comes down to saving the rights of Queenslanders, the LNP stands shoulder to shoulder with those hardworking Queensland families, graziers and landowners to protect it. I urge the House to support the amendment to the motion.