




Speech By
Hon. Michael Healy

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

Record of Proceedings, 22 May 2024

MOTION

North Queensland, Secession

 **Hon. MP HEALY** (Cairns—ALP) (Minister for Tourism and Sport) (4.35 pm): I rise to oppose the motion as a Far North Queenslander. I appreciate the passion but I always remember reading some time ago the saying of Philip II of Macedonia: never surrender reason to passion. I want to begin by acknowledging the passion of the member for Traeger in some of the points that he raised. I agree that, when we look at federal representation and the number of senators, we can learn from that. However, inefficiencies in some areas certainly do not increase efficiencies in other areas.

With no detail from the member for Traeger about how North Queensland secession would work, we can only make the cruel assumption that it will mean more politicians and more bureaucracy. I want to make it abundantly clear that I think we should be looking at reducing government, if anything. Whether we look at getting rid of councils or—

Mr Dametto interjected.

Mr HEALY: You will never learn anything when you are talking.

Mr Lister: That is why you know nothing.

Mr HEALY: I have never been kicked out of the chamber, buddy. Maybe we should look at other ways of increasing efficiencies. Billions of dollars have been given to councils. I have to reflect back to a speech made on 15 September 2016. The member speaking in that debate, probably in the same tone as me, was the then treasurer, minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partnerships and minister for sport. Mr Speaker, you might remember that. I read that speech and I thought, 'Gee, there are some good points.'

I can understand the reasoning for people living in the north but we have to look at the reality, and that is that maybe now is not the time. I would love to see the member for Traeger as premier. I think he would make a great premier. He is well dressed. He presents well. He is passionate. I can see the member for Hill as the treasurer. He would be a fantastic treasurer. I can see the member for Hinchinbrook as the attorney-general and police minister. While they raise concerns about how certain environmental decisions are made down here about up there, I can only imagine how people down here would feel about decisions made up there.

Putting to one side the emotive language of proponents of separation, nobody has made it quite clear how it would be funded. At the end of the day it does come down to the money. A lot of the points that the member for Traeger touched on refer to efficiencies of delivery, and these things all come down to fiscal responsibility. There is much talk about what the north produces in terms of royalties and gross state product, without any discussion on how much it would cost to set up and run the necessary health, education and emergency services.

I acknowledge the comments from the member for Traeger regarding the Cowboys. The Cowboys play in a stadium that was built by the taxpayers of Queensland and the Australian government. The NRL, who are a national club, put in a significant amount of money. These things do not just happen. There is usually a collective.

While we are not denying that mining royalties originate from North Queensland, infrastructure and services in regional areas are more proportionately funded and subsidised than those in the south-east purely because of the cost of the decentralised nature of our state and the cost of service delivery in rural and remote regions.

Can you imagine what it would cost to deliver power across northern Queensland without the subsidy of consumers from the south-east? It would be unprecedented and it would be significant, but you have to build the infrastructure. You have to put these things in place. In the 2023-24 state budget over \$16 billion was invested in regional Queensland thanks to coal royalties. That is \$16 billion of investment in regional Queensland the LNP does not, and would not, support because they would not support that sort of investment with that funding. The \$16 billion investment in regional Queensland is in comparison to the \$4.3 billion spent on infrastructure in Brisbane and Redlands last year alone. If you look at subsidisation and the way the money is being spent, a single state is a strong state both economically and financially. The cost of Queensland providing the services and infrastructure we have today is significantly lower than if a new state government were formed. For example, money raised in the more populated south-east corner is used to build schools and roads and pay teachers, doctors and nurses across the population. These are the facts and they remain undisputed. It could be a discussion we have in 100 years, but the reality is that at the moment it would weaken our state and it would be a very poor North Queensland.