




Speech By
James Lister

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

Record of Proceedings, 3 April 2025

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Resumed from 14 March (see p. 568).

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (5.06 pm), continuing: I am very pleased to continue with the second half of my contribution to the address-in-reply debate. For those who are riveted by what I have to say and want to read the earlier half, they can find it in the *Record of Proceedings* of 14 March at page 567. I was talking about roads in my electorate. I drive the roads in my electorate of Southern Downs every day. I do a lot of kilometres. I zigzag all over the place—from Millmerran to Toobeah to Goondiwindi to Goomburra to Wallangarra and everywhere in between—so I understand that the roads are in a poor condition. I say to my electors that I am very pleased to have been able to meet with the Minister for Transport and Main Roads on a number of occasions and he and his director-general were very good to visit me in Southern Downs in February to see the condition of the roads firsthand. I look forward to working with the minister and the government to rectify the condition of the roads.

Basically, millions and millions—billions—is being blown out on projects in the south-east corner and funds have been drawn away from the maintenance of roads in country Queensland. I know that there are country members here who would agree with me on that. Consequently, our roads have been left to go to rack and ruin in order to prop up blowouts in the south-east corner. Those sorts of blowouts are going to cease under an LNP government and that will liberate funds to attend to our roads, and not just to attend to our roads but to do them properly so that the taxpayer gets real value for money when spending money on the roads—a proper fix that will last and will do the community and the users of the roads proud. I tow my mobile office with me all over the electorate and there are many places—my electors would agree with me—where I have to slow down to 60 kilometres per hour on a highway because the mobile office and in some cases even the ute that I drive cannot take it, so I get it. I can assure the electors of Southern Downs that I will continue to advocate for the improvement of roads in our electorate and I know that over time we will reverse the lack of investment in the roads under the last government.

On 14 March, the member for Bundaberg spoke prior to me in this debate and I heard him make some very complimentary remarks about me, and I do thank him for that. I wondered whether perhaps it was a plan to poison me or make sure that I do not progress on my side of politics, but I will assume that that is not the case, although it does bring to mind the old Labor saying that to be liked by certain Labor mates is like getting a bunch of carnations from the mafia. So I will let that one hang and see how I survive in the immediate future.

The member for Bundaberg talked about water and Emu Swamp Dam. Emu Swamp Dam, in case anyone is unaware of it, is a project that I strongly support. All jokes aside, it needs to be said that under the previous government Emu Swamp Dam did not progress. There was reason after reason, cost blowout after cost blowout, advanced as to why it could not go ahead. I remember the previous water minister, the member for Gladstone, coming into the House and saying that the price increases on Emu Swamp Dam were LNP blowouts. Obviously, that is not the case. I think Emu Swamp Dam can be built for much less than has recently been said because of the unnecessary scope creep and gold

plating that had occurred under the previous administration—I suspect in order to make sure it could not be built. I have had a lot to do with my honourable friend the Minister for Water, Ann Leahy, and her department and I will continue to advocate to progress that dam.

There is an ongoing assessment of options to provide water on the Granite Belt. It basically boils down to two options. One is to have a pipeline which would pipe water for drinking from Connolly Dam in Warwick up to the town of Stanthorpe. That would be needed in the occasional year when Storm King Dam runs dry. As we saw during the last drought, \$18 million—or an amount similar to that—was spent over 18 months to truck drinking water from Warwick to Stanthorpe. I do not favour that option—firstly, because it has to go across granite country and, secondly, because of the cost. I do not think we would get out of that for much less than half a billion dollars—and that is just for drinking water for the occasions when the town runs dry.

The reason I prefer Emu Swamp Dam is that, as a project, it provides not only drinking water to sustain the town of Stanthorpe but also, importantly, irrigation for the horticultural industry, which is vital to the existence of the town of Stanthorpe. There are hundreds and hundreds of additional jobs that will be generated because of the additional planting that can occur if reliable water is available. It is not just the water that they need because they have run dry; it is the knowledge that that water is available. It is high-security water, which means that the industry can plant with confidence and can commit to forward contracts in the knowledge that, even if they are dry, they still have water available from Emu Swamp Dam.

It is a very important project. It is the most developed dam project in Queensland at this stage. We would be mad not to continue with it and use the allocations that are available in the last possible dam in the northern basin of the Murray-Darling system. I will continue to advocate for Emu Swamp Dam. I know that it has the support of my community and the growers who provide our food, who provide jobs and who generate taxes to pay for the public services that we administer and ourselves as politicians, and we should not forget that.

I am also looking forward to the LNP government taking a more courteous approach with irrigators regarding water. I noticed under previous administrations a more arbitrary approach to irrigators: the announcement as a fait accompli of changes to criteria for pumping of water and other, what I felt were, discourteous practices around identifying approvals for storages and those sorts of things. I suspect that this was done in order to placate the federal government or to comply with the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement. I think water rights are akin to property rights. I thought the way the departments under the previous administration acted with irrigators large and small on many occasions was arbitrary and unfortunate. I am quite certain that under the LNP administration a more enlightened approach will be taken when dealing with the users of water.

Government members: Hear, hear!

Mr LISTER: I thank my honourable friends for their acknowledgment.

Wind farms is another issue that enlivens people in my electorate of Southern Downs. I thank the Deputy Premier for his announcement of the new criteria applying to the approval of renewable energy projects such as wind farms in renewable energy zones like Southern Downs. The previous government used the state legislature to provide a process where renewable energy projects could be streamlined and put through against the wishes of the communities that host them. I think that is an affront to country people, because the benefits of the projects tend to be achieved only by a limited number whereas a majority suffer the negative impacts of hosting them. That is fundamentally unfair. It divides communities. I wrote to the previous minister about that, without avail.

I am very pleased that one of the first acts of the Crisafulli government was to restore the rights of third parties to appeal the construction of wind farms in communities to make sure they were impact assessable and to ensure there was proper consultation. As a result of that new policy, I have had much more frequent interactions with the proponents of renewable energy projects. That is a good thing because it enables me to insist that if they want my support, or even my acquiescence, then certain things have to occur, such as genuine community support, and that the community benefits—not just the few who host the particular infrastructure.

Housing is a problem for all of us. In the context of Southern Downs, the shortage of housing manifests itself in the inability to get police, teachers, nurses and public sector employees to our towns like Goondiwindi. All of the government houses are occupied. A school says, 'We have managed to secure this excellent teacher who wants to come and work in our school, but then they say, "I'm afraid I can't fulfil my intention to come and work with you because I can't find somewhere to live."' That has a fundamental impact on our community, quite apart from the moral dimension of the number of people who are living with homelessness in my electorate of Southern Downs. The problem is often masked. We all know what it is like to walk down Albert Street in the city and see unfortunate people who are

living on the streets. That is happening in my electorate too, but they live in tents and in cars parked out of sight or in caravans inside sheds on someone's property. It is no less of an evil that those people are homeless. I welcome the LNP government's intention to engage with the not-for-profit sector—with churches and community groups.

Mrs Poole interjected.

Mr LISTER: I take that acknowledgement from my honourable friend the member for Mundingburra. She knows exactly what I am talking about. That is the way to unlock potential: to engage with those who understand the needs of the community, the kinds of housing required, and give back respect. They can deliver housing in partnership with the government, getting every last cent out of every last dollar. I commend the government and Minister Bonney—Minister O'Connor, sorry! Perhaps they should call his electorate 'O'Connor' in honour of his great success in that particular role. I thank him and the government for that. I see that as a critical enabler to expand housing of the kind we need in Southern Downs going forward.

Crime is a problem in many of our electorates, in particular in Goondiwindi in my electorate. I thank the government, particularly the Minister for Youth Justice, the Attorney-General and the Premier, for their concerted work to bring in consequences for actions so that those who commit offences are not let out by the court to immediately reoffend. I ask anyone who says, 'No, you can't lock them up; that wouldn't be fair,' to go and knock on the door of Aileen Norman, whose home was invaded by someone who was let out on bail that very day, and say to her, 'No, you don't understand. You needed to be home-invaded so that that person could be at liberty.' Obviously, no-one is going to do that. The idea that we should not incarcerate offenders in order to protect good law-abiding people who are entitled to protection and entitled to live safely in their communities is bankrupt and we need not hear anything more of it in this House.

In recent days I have heard much about pill testing. I can confidently assure the House that pill testing is objected to by the good and true folk of Southern Downs.

Mr Vorster interjected.

Mr LISTER: I thank my honourable friend the member for Burleigh for his acknowledgement. There are three reasons for that objection. Firstly, pill testing undermines respect for the law. It sends the clear and incongruous message that, whilst it is illegal, we are facilitating you to do it. Secondly, it tells people that it is okay to take drugs. I cannot see how anybody could infer otherwise. Thirdly, and this is the part which is not often ventilated in this House, it gives succour to organised crime. By organised crime I mean the vicious and violent organisations that import or create drugs and distribute them. Wherever there are drugs there is repression, there is violence and there is other activity such as illegal immigration and sex slavery. I think the people who are taking drugs ought to have a good, hard look at themselves and say, 'Do I really want to support that?'