



Speech by

HOWARD HOBBS

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

Hansard 12 March 1987

FIRST SPEECH

Mr HOBBS (Warrego) (11.01 a.m.): Mr Speaker, I rise to support the motion for the adoption of the Address in Reply as moved by the member for Mansfield and seconded by the member for Townsville. At the outset of my speech, I pledge my support and continuing loyalty to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, through His Excellency the Governor, Sir Walter Campbell. It is my belief that support for the Crown, the Commonwealth and the flag is indeed strong throughout the nation and I would like to here pay tribute to the dignity and decorum of the ceremonies attached to the opening of Parliament.

I take this opportunity to thank the people of Warrego for giving me the support required in order to bring their message to the Forty-fifth Parliament. I recall that in days gone by it was customary for a politician to conclude his letter to his constituent with the words "Your obedient servant". I will endeavour never to forget that this is the position in which I have placed myself—that of servant to the people of Warrego and, indeed, the people of Queensland.

I extend special thanks to my campaign director, Vic Calcino, and supporters, Frank Manthey, Lex Stephenson and Dougal Davidson, who worked tirelessly during my campaign. Many thanks also to the National Party branches of the electorate, who formed the base of our campaign, and particularly to my wife, Marilyn, who not only gave moral support, but also courageously braved many savage dogs while door-knocking in our towns. There are many, many more keen supporters, too numerous to mention; to them I offer my sincere thanks.

To all other new members, to returned members and to you, Mr Speaker, I offer my congratulations on being elected to this Forty-fifth Parliament. The media and the public these days frequently paint a black picture of politicians in general. They often describe us as being liars and cheats. I believe that it is up to us, in this Forty-fifth Parliament, to do our level best to change this attitude to make sure that we uphold honour and integrity, to fight our campaigns cleanly. Lady Bjelke-Petersen, indeed, had the last word in the November election campaign with the old saying, "He who throws the most mud loses the most ground."

Mr Speaker, while on the subject of campaigns, may I say how disgusted I was at the low tactics used by the Opposition in the form of personal attacks on the Premier of this State. It was gratifying to see the contempt the electors of Queensland held for the people responsible. We saw possibly one of the biggest anti-Government media election campaigns ever seen in this country. Perhaps members of the media concerned might like to remember this: "He who lies down with dogs will rise with fleas!"

In the Premier, Queensland has a proven leader—one who can stand up and be counted; one who is totally dedicated to serving the people of Queensland; one who perceives the feelings of the man and woman in the street; and, above all, one who can deliver. Mr Speaker, it is a pity the media, too, cannot perceive the needs and feelings of the people and report them accurately.

I move on to the subject of Queensland, the pride we have in our State and the philosophy for our continued growth. Queensland has developed from humble beginnings. Our forefathers chose to get out on their own and quickly realised that, if they did not get things done themselves, nobody else would. They embraced the challenge with enthusiasm. Over the years their zeal has been frequently hindered by the southern-based power play. Nevertheless, these circumstances have moulded Queenslanders into fiercely independent people, determined to succeed and to take this great State of ours into the twenty-first century as one of the leading States in the nation.

We have pride in our State, and with good reason when one considers the dramatic achievements over recent years. We have expanded and developed in all directions—commercially, politically and culturally. Queensland now has indeed a great future, the framework of which has been set up by our own National Party Government.

During the period of post-resources development, Australians have made huge demands on their politicians. They have expected, demanded and insisted that Australians have an increased standard of living each year; that there be full employment; that there be a very substantial boost in our currency, together with no inflation; that there be job-creation and the creation of economic wealth; and that the attempts which have been made to meet these demands under a socialist philosophy obviously can no longer continue. This is plain for us all to see.

There is a consensus here in Australia and internationally today—a consensus that says, "You can't do that any more." The business of Government must get smaller; and what the community spends, it must first earn. It will be a shock for Australians to have to accept that changes must be made.

I take this opportunity also to talk of my electorate of Warrego and its people, the issues and the distances. Of course, would not be right to talk of Warrego without some mention of the great work done in the electorate by my predecessor, Neil Turner, the former Minister for Primary Industries, and his wife, Ute. I would like to place on record in this House the gratitude the people of Warrego have for Neil and the respect and affection gained as member for that vast electorate. Through Neil and our National Party Government, we have seen great improvements in the field of education, health and roads—just to name a few.

In this debate I wish to raise a number of the issues which I consider are important to the people of Warrego, whom I have the privilege to represent in this Parliament. The Warrego electorate is one of the oldest in this State, as well as one of the largest. Proclaimed in 1864, it covers an area of 222 500 square kilometres, stretching from Springsure in the north to the New South Wales border beyond Cunnamulla in the south, and from Amby in the east to beyond Thargomindah to the South Australian border in the west.

Since the mid-1800s when Major Mitchell first explored the area, Warrego has relied largely on the sheep and cattle industries. However, in recent years we have seen the increased exploration for oil and gas and the discovery of the nation's largest onshore oil and gas-fields in the Cooper and Eromanga basins. A pipeline was built from these fields into the existing oil pipeline that runs from Moonie to Brisbane. That pipeline carries 30 000 barrels of oil per day, and road tankers carry a further 1 400 barrels per day to Moonie. In 1986, that was worth \$214m.

The discovery and recovery of oil in these basins has not gone without problems. In particular, the need for better roads to service these oil-fields has meant that contractors and shire councils have had to build up infrastructure to furnish those requirements.

The reduction of oil prices on the world market, combined with the Federal Government's policies of reducing incentive for oil exploration, has now placed a severe economic and social burden on some western towns. The oil tankers keep rolling on, along fast-deteriorating roads. It is now up to the oil companies and the State Government to face this responsibility and to continue to upgrade and maintain these vital means of communication in inland Queensland.

The proposed development of the Gilmore gas-field near Blackall will bring some long-awaited stability to the economy of the Blackall town and district. The 100 kilometre gas pipeline to the Blackall-based fertiliserworks will mean a welcome change of philosophy for western Queensland, where the raw product is to be refined on site and distributed as the finished article. Ready markets are available in the mining areas to the north, the farming areas to the east and along coastal regions of Queensland.

Farming is an industry carried on in the eastern and northern portions of Warrego. The industry developed over years when both grain prices and seasons were a bit more reliable. Of recent times, owing to reduced grain prices, exorbitant prices for machinery and high interest rates, cash cropping has become less profitable—hence farmers are turning to crop-fattening and feed-lotting of cattle or returning to grazing, where possible.

The sheep and cattle industries remain one of the economic mainstays of the Warrego electorate, despite the onslaught of many severe droughts since 1965. However, there is another new industry brightening the future of the west, one that is not as dependent upon the weather—tourism. I believe that the tourist industry is one of our vast untapped resources, which will, under careful management, continue to grow and contribute more and more to the wealth of the west. To do this, it is essential that our national highways and air transport facilities are given top priority and that tourism is given maximum promotion and encouragement by this Government.

On the subject of roads—Warrego has a network of 14 000 kilometres of roads to be maintained. That represents a greater distance than the entire length of Highway 1, which goes right around the Australian continent. Though the standard of some roads in Warrego has greatly improved

in the past 10 years, still more attention is needed to the widening and upgrading of the national highway, which represents the life-line of the west. We have seen an enormous increase in the use of the Warrego Highway in the transport of commodities between Mount Isa and Brisbane, Mount Isa and Sydney, and all parts in between. Some sections require urgent attention, particularly the continuation of the Booringa Shire's work near Mitchell and in the northern Warrego between Tambo and Blackall, where the national highway is very narrow, breaking up badly, and is potentially dangerous, especially when it is wet.

Other areas which should have priority are from the oil-fields at Jackson and Eromanga to Thargomindah and Quilpie. As I mentioned before, the oil companies and the State Government must face their responsibilities to make these roads meet a standard at which the motoring public will not be in danger.

We have already seen great benefits in western Queensland since the recent sealing of the Cunnamulla-Wyandra road, allowing buyers in the south greater access to livestock in our area, thus bringing millions of dollars into western Queensland. This can be repeated when other barriers are broken and roads between Tambo, Alpha and Springsure are developed to link New South Wales to the rich farming areas of the Central Highlands around Emerald. The potential is enormous, with the increasing importance of tourism and the effect on trade between the coast and the inland—trade which encompasses cotton, grain, livestock, fertiliser and sugar-cane by-products.

I am pleased to see that so many members of this House are, or have been, members of local authorities. Local government is a great training ground and one which gives close contact with the people and their requirements. It also gives a better understanding of the frustrations sometimes felt by councils with their partner in Government. My association with local government goes back to 1975, when I was first elected to the Tambo Shire Council. In 1980 I became Shire Chairman, a position I still hold. There are no less than seven local authorities included in my electorate. Because they are major employers, they play a vital role in western Queensland and, as such, are essential to the economies of the towns concerned. Healthy and efficient local authorities can play a major role in continuing decentralisation and towards expanding infrastructure for the development of inland Queensland and Australia.

The role of local government now extends into many areas which were once the province of both State and Federal Governments and local community organisations. Although they have accepted it in the long run, most councils have been reluctant to extend their role as this has usually meant more expenditure with not much direct increase in revenue from the proposed projects. I am referring to projects such as retirement homes, sport and recreational facilities, tourism, hospitality, communications, commercial and cultural activities, and so on.

Shire councils in Warrego and the west are facing drastic cut-backs from the Main Roads Department for works in all categories of roads. We are fully prepared to accept these cut-backs as being necessary in these troubled times, provided they are across the board and do not disadvantage some districts to the benefit of others.

In the area of health, we have benefited greatly over recent years with new and upgraded hospitals throughout Warrego. The people of Tambo and Blackall are appreciative of a second doctor in Blackall, which means a second clinic day each week in Tambo. At the moment, Augathella is awaiting the replacement of a permanent doctor. I hope this is soon forthcoming as this hospital doctor is very important to the districts of Morven, Augathella and Tambo, where he, or she, conducts weekly clinics.

When one talks of health in western Queensland, one thinks of the Royal Flying Doctor Service—so vital in emergencies in isolated areas, as well as being very necessary in conducting regular clinics at Thargomindah, Noccundra, Jackson, Thylungra and other places not easily reached by road. I am pleased to see that this year the State Government was able to increase its contribution to that essential outback service.

As with all electorates throughout Queensland, education in Warrego is a key issue. Fifteen years ago the State school in Cunnamulla did not even have lights. It is just as well that it does not rain too much out there because the kids could not see the blackboard on a cloudy day. Things have come a long way since then and the State Government has recognised the need for continual improvement of facilities to attract and hold teachers, and to ensure that country children are not disadvantaged.

The people of Warrego have long been looking for the establishment of a TAFE college in Charleville. This college is well overdue and would service a huge area of the outback, giving students opportunities which are often taken for granted in metropolitan areas.

I must here mention the important work done by the people in the area to assist the education of their children. Organisations such as the ICPA and the local p. and c. associations are alive and well and play a vital role in acting as advisers and watchdogs for our State Education Department.

The distances in our western electorates are not fully understood by all, and least of all by the Opposition parties, who use the electoral boundaries as their excuse for not being able to be in Government when, in fact, it is their dismal understanding of the needs of the people throughout Queensland that is the cause.

Some metropolitan politicians could ride around their entire electorate on a bicycle on a Sunday afternoon, if they so desired; while in Warrego, Cook or Gregory it would take at least six months on a bicycle, even if it was possible.

Our western electorates are completely different. We do not always have phones that work. Some lines that have to be maintained by the subscriber run for hundreds of kilometres. The majority of calls are trunk calls. The chances are that one cannot hear very well anyway and, if one can, the induction often prevents a private conversation.

An interview with the local member on some unexpected matter may, for constituents from outlying areas, necessitate a journey of up to 700 kilometres. I ask the advocates of one vote, one value whether they would be prepared to travel from Brisbane to Rockhampton to have a private discussion with their member. If the one vote, one value system were ever introduced, it would mean the people from the furthest points would probably have to double the distance they already have to travel to see their member. A lot of people in this State and nation would not travel that far from home in a life-time.

The kangaroo industry in Queensland is worth \$3m annually in exports and supports 1 500 shooters throughout the State.

The kangaroo quota has become a major issue in Warrego, particularly since 1984 when the newly elected Hawke Labor Government threw the industry into turmoil with a reduction in the quota from 1.5 million to 845 000. We saw a similar situation with the previous Whitlam Labor Government when the number of kangaroos to be harvested was reduced from 1 073 000 to 457 000. It is blatantly obvious that the Federal Labor Government is more interested in the whims and wishes of the often misinformed conservationists, who have some strange ideas about kangaroo populations, than in the expertise and livelihood of people involved in the kangaroo industry.

There are many more State Government-related areas which are essential to the well-being of the people of Warrego, but time does not permit me to expand on them today. I refer to the Departments of Primary Industries, Police, Community Services, and Railways, and the Water Resources Commission, to name a few.

In the years ahead I look forward to working with such a talented team of National Party men and women in this Government to make Warrego and, indeed, all of Queensland, an even better place in which to live. I thank you, Mr Speaker, and honourable members for their tolerance.
