



Speech by

Mr T. MALONE

MEMBER FOR MIRANI

Hansard 22 June 1994

FIRST SPEECH

Mr MALONE (Mirani) (8.39 p.m.): As the newly elected member for Mirani, I pledge my loyalty and that of my electors to Her Majesty the Queen and her representative in Queensland, Her Excellency the Governor. It is also my great pleasure to have the opportunity to pay tribute and respect to my predecessor, Mr Jim Randell, who held the seat of Mirani for 14 years. Jim Randell represented the electorate of Mirani with distinction, both as a Minister of the Crown and as a backbencher. Jim's strength was that he was able to put his stamp on all that he did. He was still able to do this in a calm and gentlemanly manner. I hope and I aspire to conduct myself, both inside and outside the House, in a similar manner. I wish Jim the very best in the coming years.

The recent by-election for the seat of Mirani was a very short and intensive campaign. I would like to record my deep-felt gratitude to all those people who made sacrifices to help me and the campaign during that period, including the Leader of the Opposition, Rob Borbidge, Deputy Leader, Joan Sheldon, shadow Ministers and backbenchers and to all those supporters and personal friends who helped on the day, particularly Charlie Brownlow and the campaign committee.

My tribute must also go to my wife and family for their untiring support leading up to and during the campaign. Without their support, I would not be here. It would be remiss of me if I did not make mention of the dedicated and hardworking people who were involved in the campaign throughout the by-election through the National Party organisation, the branches, the women's groups and the Young Nationals. I can assure them that their dedicated work was very much appreciated.

The result of the by-election at the end of the day was very satisfying. As a National Party candidate supported by the Liberal Party, I was able to achieve more than 52 per cent of the primary vote. My selection as a joint candidate for the National Party and Liberal Party was historic in that it has been more than 20 years since that has happened in Queensland and certainly the first time ever in Mirani.

The boundaries of the seat of Mirani have changed quite a number of times since the time of its inception in 1911. It now covers an area from about 40 kilometres north of Rockhampton, 350 kilometres up along the coast into the northern suburbs of Mackay and westward to, but not including, the coalfields. However, it does include the mining town of Glenden and the major railway town of Coppabella.

The seat of Mirani is historic in that it has been held by such a small number of high profile members. From 1935 to 1947 it was held by Ted Walsh, of the ALP, who later held the seat of Bundaberg and was Treasurer and Transport Minister from 1950 to 1969. Ernest Evans, from the Country Party, held the seat from 1947 until his death in 1963. Then, of course, Tom Newbery, CP—and some honourable members would remember him—took over from then until 1980. Jim Randell held the seat for the next 14 years.

The electorate contains some 24 000 enrolled constituents and contains some or all of the Shires of Sarina, Mirani, Nebo, Mackay and Broadsound and the numerous centres of Sarina, Walkerston, Bakers Creek, Koumala, Carmila, Marian, Finch Hatton, Eungella, Nebo, St Lawrence and Marlborough. All have their own unique problems and needs.

We must all remember the never-ending voluntary work that the local charities and service clubs do in each of these towns to make them a better place in which to live. The local Apex, Lions, Rotary and Scope clubs, in conjunction with Scouts, lifesavers, pensioner leagues, RSLs, church and civilian widows' groups are a few of the organisations that contribute to the wellbeing of the community.

I am well aware of the history of the electorate and I have some challenging ideals to live up to. I can assure you, Mr Speaker, that I am determined to serve my electorate with honesty, vigour and commitment.

I firmly believe that we all are a product of environment and heritage, and I am extremely proud of mine. My parents began pioneering work on the family property in the early thirties, while my father cut cane by hand to establish the property. I was the first of four children, and I can vividly remember doing homework by the light of a kerosene lamp and riding to school on a bike on a dirt track with grass growing in the middle. I attended high school at Sarina and was school captain. I returned to the farm in 1961 and I cut cane by hand for two years before starting out with both frustration and excitement in the new era of mechanical cane harvesting. I have continued my involvement until this year. I am pleased to have my wife, Mary, and my father in the Chamber tonight.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

Mr MALONE: Over this time, I have been active in many community organisations, and one of those was Apex. I am very proud to be a charter member of Sarina Apex Club, having served in the positions of club president, district governor and zone president, and finally a life member of the Sarina Apex Club.

Also in that time, for more than 20 years I was a delegate to the Australian Sugar Producers Association and later served five years on the board of the Australian Cane Farmers Association, three of those as chairman, until the time I entered Parliament. In this role, I served on the Sugar Industry Policy Council and Sugar Research and Development Corporation Selection Committee and was involved in discussions leading up to the division of sugar moneys, which happened recently.

Mirani is the most important sugar-producing electorate in Queensland, with a production of about 6.6 million tonnes of cane through four mills this year. Plane Creek is owned by CSR, and Racecourse, Marian and Pleystowe are owned by the Mackay Sugar Cooperative. In addition, Mackay Sugar has just built a sugar refinery at Racecourse Mill, and a silo and loading facility at Mackay Harbour, at a total cost of \$80m. The refinery will have a capacity of 350 000 tonnes of white sugar per year for both domestic and export customers.

CSR has invested heavily in the ethanol industry, with the construction of a \$24m Bio Still Technology Plant at Sarina. The plant produces 140 000 kilolitres of ethanol for both export and domestic use per year out of an input of 220 000 tonnes of molasses.

One must remember that this is the best season we have had since the disastrous years at the turn of the decade. For instance, the Plane Creek Mill at Sarina only crushed 485 000 tonnes of cane in 1991. However, this year there is an expectation that it will process about 1.5 million tonnes, and there is a similar comparison in all the other mill areas in Mackay. However, these figures mask the heartbreaking and soul-destroying effect on people through that period of drought.

Since that time, there has been a tremendous investment by farmers in farm dams, bores and irrigation equipment running into tens of millions of dollars. The extra pump capacity of the recharge system for the Kinchant Dam, together with the coming on-line of the Teemburra Dam in a few years' time, should mean that a portion of the Pioneer Valley will be drought-proof. However, there have to be assurances that the area in the Upper Pioneer Valley will be first served by water from the Teemburra scheme and that there will be a continuing and urgent investment in water storage in the upper valley to ensure that the disaster of the 1990s will never happen again.

Because of the below average rainfall and more reliance on irrigation, the ground water level has dropped to an historically low level. Indeed, in the Chelona and Bakers Creek areas, some bores have become unusable because of salt intrusion. The supply of irrigation water for farm production has a manyfold effect. Firstly, it assures a higher and sustainable production through both good times and bad. Secondly, it creates an enhanced positive outlook with greater employment and business opportunities. Thirdly, it ensures that our smaller provincial towns remain viable, with greater economic benefit to all.

So, when one asks, "What price water to farmers?", or "Should the user pays principal apply to all water projects put in place by Governments", one must also realise the tremendous economic benefits to the wider community and the major benefits to Government in increased economic activity, which of course will lead to a broader and larger taxation base. There is no point in supplying water to farmers at a price they cannot afford.

The southern cane railway system is about to commence and not only will ensure that the southern region of the Plane Creek Mill remains viable but also will access a great deal of potential new

cane land. The southern cane railway is being built from money gained from the Sugar Industry Infrastructure Fund and from a loan taken out in partnership by the mill and growers, with the mill supplying rolling stock and growers guaranteeing a level of freight charges to enable the project to be paid off over about 10 years. The total cost of the project will be \$22m.

The infrastructure money being used in these projects was negotiated by the sugar industry with both the State and Federal Governments as a compensation factor for the winding back of the No. 1 Pool price premium and, among other things, the changed circumstances in the ownership of the bulk sugar terminals. However, the area south of Sarina extending down to the boundary of the electorate is in a critical position with regard to assured water supply. To enable the southern area to expand to its full potential, there is an urgent need for a reliable and sustainable water supply. There are substantial plans for tourist developments all along that section of the coastline, and certainly a major development in the Clairview area is being proposed. Without doubt, the potential for crop and fodder production in the St Lawrence and Marlborough areas on the coast and inland of those areas would be enhanced enormously by a reliable water supply.

I call on the Government to upgrade its priorities in relation to a dam in the Connors River and Isaacs River area. I believe that a considerable amount of survey work has already been done in that regard. That area has a catchment of 19 500 square kilometres, with an annual mean run-off of 2 million megalitres at the Yatton gauging station on the Isaacs River. In comparison, the Burdekin River has a catchment of 114 000 square kilometres and a mean annual flow of 6 million megalitres. So it can be seen that there is tremendous potential, particularly as this storage will be elevated above the coastal plain, and there will be an opportunity to generate power as water is dropped down to the coast for irrigation, industrial and domestic use.

Drought has a debilitating and limiting effect on the electorate, as it does of course across the rest of Queensland. Indeed, despite widespread rain, there are areas that are still severely affected by years of adverse weather conditions. The Nebo district is one area that is currently severely affected.

The Hay Point coal loading complex is the major industrial enterprise in the electorate. Construction began on facilities in 1969 with the development of Goonyella mine, and the first vessel was loaded in 1971. There are two companies operating separate coal loading facilities, Hay Point Services Pty Ltd and the Dalrymple Bay Coal Terminal. Hay Point Services Pty Ltd is operated by its owners, Central Queensland Coal Associates Joint Ventures, and has an investment of about \$700m and a budget allocation of \$15m for a new ship loader this year. The current facility will load 24 million tonnes of coal this year into 300 ships.

Dalrymple Bay Coal Terminal Pty Ltd was formed in 1981 to manage, operate and maintain the terminal on behalf of the owner, the Harbours Corporation of Queensland. The first coal was shipped in 1983, and Dalrymple Bay is currently going through a major expansion stage at an estimated cost of \$160m added to an establishment cost of \$450m. After expansion, Dalrymple Bay will have the capacity to load about 26.5 million tonnes per year and, combined with Hay Point Services, is the largest coal port in Australia and second largest in the world, with a combined output of 50 million tonnes a year. The largest coal port in the world is Richards Bay in South Africa. The total investment in the export facility, in conjunction with the associated tug boat harbour, is in the vicinity of \$1,400m.

Mirani boasts some of the most scenic and spectacular areas in Queensland. From the isolated long, white beaches in the Cape Palmerston National Park to the beautiful rainforest and scenic views of Finch Hatton Gorge and Eungella National Park down to Shoalwater and Stanish Bays, there is a heightening awareness of the value of tourism in the area, and there must be a greater emphasis on maintaining and developing better facilities in these and other tourist areas within the electorate. I refer mainly to access roads, walking tracks and camping facilities that will encourage people to stay longer with us when they visit. I will be making representations for Government funds to upgrade access into Finch Hatton Gorge and Cape Palmerston National Park, because any upgrading in those tourist destinations is certainly beyond the resources of the local authorities.

Because of distance and isolation, and particularly because the electorate has more than 300 kilometres of the Bruce Highway, there is a desperate need for a dedicated medivac aircraft, preferably rotary wing, to be stationed in the electorate to cover the area from the reef to the coal mines. The Bruce Highway is now carrying more than 4 000 cars a day, and accidents are unfortunately becoming very common in the isolated areas around St Lawrence, causing funding and manning problems for the voluntary SES members who live there and who frequently have to deal with these emergencies. Indeed, the community of Nebo, which is a key centre between Mackay and the coalfields, faces a similar situation with a severely disjointed emergency services system—a situation which is ineffective and potentially dangerous, but one which can be overcome by a combined facility. Other regions on the coast similar in size to the Mirani electorate have dedicated rescue facilities, and I will be making representations and lobbying for a similar service.

The ultimate result of deregulated shopping hours is that the smaller corner-type stores will come under extreme pressure to compete for market share and, in those circumstances, many will not

survive. The tragedy is that policies that allow consumers extended shopping hours, thereby eliminating competition by bankrupting small businesses, may backfire and cost consumers dearly.

The beef industry has a major input into the economy of the region, and there must be recognition that whatever can be done to sustain the industry must be done. Road trains are the cheapest and most effective method of transporting cattle into the Bakers Creek abattoir. At the present time, they have to terminate their trip at the top of the Eton Range and transfer cattle to a single trailer. I will be making representations to the Government to upgrade parts of the range road so that road trains may terminate closer to the abattoir.

There is also an urgent need for a high-level bridge over Cattle Creek at Gargett. During periods of wet weather, the low-level bridge—which is also narrow and dangerous—is frequently flooded, causing major disruption and inconvenience to the people living in the top end of the valley, particularly school children and the dairy industry at Eungella and surrounding areas.

One of my personal disappointments is the winding back of services in country areas. One of the losses has been railway stations on the coastal line in places such as Koumala and Carmila, and reduced services at Sarina to the extent that in the early hours of the morning elderly people with luggage are frequently dumped up to 200 metres or 300 metres from a darkened, deserted platform, sometimes with no pay phones, lighting or other facilities.

In relation to law and order matters, it is imperative that the strength of the Queensland Police Service be maintained and enhanced so that more police can be placed on the beat, so to speak. I will be active in supporting the toughening up of laws to ensure that people who break laws pay the price relative to the offence. It is so disappointing to read sometimes that, after months of investigation by police, when the case is brought before the courts, the offender is given a suspended sentence or is sentenced and, after a short period, is let out on parole.

I have the greatest respect for the teaching profession—those people who are quite often the role models for our children. It is particularly distressing to see the almost total lack of respect for teachers, fellow students and other people's property that exists in some schools today. It would seem that, while some groups are strongly advocating students' rights, they are forgetting about the responsibilities that must accompany those rights. The frustration, stress and anxiety that results from teachers having to cope daily with disobedient and disrespectful students is far too common. It is time to bring back some old-fashioned discipline and strong basic values of what is right and what is acceptable behaviour in our society.

Mirani is a very special part of our great State, and I am determined to serve my electors—the people of Mirani—with honesty, vigour and commitment. I thank you, Mr Speaker, and the members of Parliament for the tradition of the maiden speech extended to me as the newly elected member for Mirani.
