



# Full Day Hansard Transcript (Legislative Assembly, 11 May 2011, Corrected Copy)

Extract from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Wednesday, 11 May 2011.

## GOVERNOR'S SPEECH: ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

### Fourth Day's Debate

Debate resumed from 10 May 2011.

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD (Myall Lakes) [11.28 a.m.] (Inaugural Speech): I speak in response to the Governor's Speech. I acknowledge the presence in the gallery of my partner, Sue, and my daughter Caroline. On 26 March I was privileged to be elected to represent the wonderful people of the Myall Lakes electorate on behalf of The Nationals. I will honour the trust that has been bestowed on me and will always put Myall Lakes first in my best endeavours for that electorate.

There are two people that I must acknowledge, John Turner and the late Bruce Cowan. My predecessor, John Turner, held the seat of Myall Lakes from its very inception—23 years of service to the people of Myall Lakes and to this House. John Turner served his electorate and the House with integrity. He held a number of shadow ministries, was a member of a number of parliamentary committees and served the people of New South Wales and Myall Lakes well. The late Bruce Cowan was the member for Oxley before going on to represent the people of the electorate of Lyne. The seat of Oxley is now held by the Deputy Premier and Leader of The Nationals. Like sands on the coast, seats tend to drift north on the coast as demographics change. But, in his day, Bruce Cowan was the face of the National Party on the lower end of the mid North Coast. From Nelson Bay in the south to Port Macquarie in the north, he was the man who kept it all glued together for conservative politics and the National Party.

Though some say that Myall Lakes is a safe seat, John Turner always said, "There is no such thing as a safe seat. It takes a good local member to make a seat safe. Anyone who is not a good local member will soon lose the seat." Myall Lakes is the most beautiful region in Australia. Others here may disagree. I cannot turn to look at my colleagues as I would like to, but I imagine that the member for Port Macquarie, or the member for Oxley, or the member for Coffs Harbour, or the member for Lismore might disagree when I assure you, Mr Assistant-Speaker, that Myall Lakes comes out on top every time. Last night I heard the member for Cronulla talk about how good his electorate is. For the benefit of members present, I think a good place and good electorate in a metropolitan city is a contradiction in terms. So I invite him to come to Myall Lakes to see firsthand how good Myall Lakes is.

Myall Lakes is one of the fastest-growing areas in New South Wales. Projections for Myall Lakes have the population of the electorate increasing 45 per cent by the year 2031. The electorate is situated on the mid North Coast and, for the benefit of our city members including possibly the member for Mount Druitt, stretches from the Karuah bridge in the south, to the Cooperook bridge in the north, Mount George to the west, and the most perfect coastline to the east.

I think underneath, all in this House agree. Myall Lakes is unique, with approximately 200 kilometres of stunning coastline and the mighty Manning River meandering from the mountains to the sea. It is the only double delta system in the southern hemisphere with its numerous islands. It has 156 kilometres of navigable waterways. The Great Lakes region, consisting of the impressive Wallis, Smiths and Myall Lakes networks, makes the Great Lakes region, together with the Manning River, the New South Wales water playground. Myall Lakes has two major commercial centres, Taree and the twin towns of Forster-Tuncurry, together with numerous towns and villages—all unique—making for a wonderful environment in which to live. Myall Lakes is not just about beaches and boating; we also have the rural hinterland only minutes from those fabulous beaches. Tourism is extremely important to the electorate, but so too are the primary and agricultural industries. We have it all: beef, dairy, chickens, pigs, fish, oysters, timber, deer, alpacas, avocados, kiwifruits—I could go on and on. This shows that the people of Myall Lakes are willing to have a go. It is an area where the sun always shines and the sky is always blue—even on a rainy day, the ocean is blue.

I have painted a picture of an idyllic place. I call it heaven on earth. However, with all its natural beauty, promise and potential, there are a number of issues on which I will work with my colleagues to find answers. Some of those issues include unemployment, health, law and order, and infrastructure. After 16 years of Labor, the people of New South Wales voted for change, real change. The Nationals went to the elections with clear, positive and practical policies to improve the living standards of those residing in regional areas—one State, one standard, and policies aimed at regional New South Wales. Country and regional people now see that The Nationals is the party that best represents those living in regional New South Wales. People now understand more than ever that The Nationals are committed to rural and regional issues. It is the main party recognising and representing the interests of

non-metropolitan New South Wales.

I come to this place with some life experiences. I am a registered nurse and former police officer. It was as a police officer on guard duty that I first came into this Chamber; that was back in the days of Neville Wran. Yesterday, the member for Campbelltown said he was the most senior officer elected to this House. I have to say that is only by rank, not by age. I am also a former grazier, solicitor and businessman. I am also a broken-down rugby player. I proudly wear the tie of the great rugby club of Forster-Tuncurry, which obviously is in my electorate.

That reminds me that on the first day of the sittings last week I thought I would try to get through the week on crutches. That was a mistake. But on the first day I was on crutches. Knowing where I would be sitting in this place, I came through the door on the Opposition side of the Chamber. As I crutched my way along the other side of the Chamber I bumped into the Leader of the Opposition, who was talking to one of the shadow Ministers. I gave them a big smile. They looked at me, as if to say, "What are you doing here?" I said, "I've been told I've got to sit with you guys." They looked puzzled. I said, "Yes, I've been told I've got to sit over here with you." They looked at me again, still puzzled. I said, "You know, when you go to football, if one team's short the other team lends them a couple of players."

With the benefit of my background and experience, I look forward to working in government to bring the changes to New South Wales that I spoke of earlier. In my electorate, unemployment is an issue. Myall Lakes is one of the lowest socioeconomic regions in Australia, and it has one of the highest unemployment rates. Taree was once the largest industrial and manufacturing centre outside the metropolitan area, other than Albury. With 16 years of Labor neglect, we have seen businesses and industries close. Many of those industries came to the Manning through the previous Coalition policy of decentralisation. I look forward to working with the Minister and Deputy Premier to identify opportunities for Myall Lakes.

Health care in the Myall Lakes area is of major concern. I listened last week and on Monday of this week to the health matters raised and the funding for new hospitals in Tamworth, Bega and Wagga Wagga. I thought, "That's interesting." It was interesting that over the past few years \$150 million has been spent on redeveloping, refurbishing and extending the Manning Base Regional Hospital—the name by which it was known, until very recently. What did the Labor Government do after spending all that money? It downgraded the hospital to the Manning Rural Referral Hospital. With that downgrading came a reduction in services. Why should the people of Manning and Myall Lakes have to travel a minimum of 75 kilometres to the north for emergency care or 180 kilometres to the south to Newcastle when people living in metropolitan Sydney may have to travel only a suburb or two?

We need full-time oncology services and magnetic resonance imaging machines [MRI] for diagnoses. A friend of mine was seriously ill with prostate cancer and had to go to Port Macquarie to access a simple diagnostic tool such as an MRI. If he was in acute care he needed an acute ambulance to take him there. It took a week to get him from Taree to Port Macquarie. Ultimately, he passed away. Perhaps that week may have made a difference. We need facilities to provide radiotherapy. Another friend of mine had breast cancer. She had a breast removed; she waited five years and got the all clear. She then had a breast reconstruction. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

Only 12 months after she had a breast reconstruction she was diagnosed with cancer in the other breast. She chose not to travel to Sydney again for radiotherapy, as she had after the removal of her first breast. She did not want to leave her family or support network. We need a stroke unit. Thirty-five per cent of our population is over the age of 65 years. We need emergency specialists and more nurses. The health Minister is an exceptional Minister for Health. She is a great advocate for health and I know she will be sympathetic to the needs of the Myall Lakes electorate.

Law and order is an issue throughout the electorate that needs our help. The local police are doing a fantastic job but they are doing it understrength and under-resourced in the Manning-Great Lakes Local Area Command. A recent report shows that the local police command is 49 officers understrength when comparing command strength to workload and then comparing it to the metropolitan area. The report further shows that regional police area commands have been discriminated against by the Labor Government over the past 16 years in that they are vastly understrength when compared to Labor-held electorates in Sydney, where commands are vastly overstrength when looking at workload. Nothing can be more equitable than to have a police strength based on workload.

Those 49 officers do not include the 30-odd police who are on permanent sick report or leave and so on. Imagine the police having to work under those conditions. It is like the chicken and the egg: so many police must work harder because they are understrength. As a result they suffer from stress and they go off on long sick report. I look forward to working with the Minister for Police to obtain equity for regional New South Wales. Infrastructure such as roads and bridges has been sadly neglected over the past 16 years. The Liberal-Nationals, through Infrastructure NSW, will spend approximately \$5 billion on infrastructure, \$1.6 billion of which has been quarantined for regional New South Wales.

During the campaign we announced funding for Main Road 90, the Nabic to Krambach road, which is the top priority for Greater

Taree City Council. We also announced funding for two sections of The Lakes Way. Ironically, two weeks later I was injured on one section of The Lakes Way. I will ensure that Myall Lakes obtains its fair share of the funding. I will talk to the Minister for Roads and Ports about extra funding. Not only was my accident on the Lakes Way at Hallidays Point but the police prosecutor's wife had been involved in an accident at that intersection a month before, and there was another accident there two weeks later. Indeed, I have represented a husband and father in a matter in which he was the driver when his wife and child were killed on that section of road. I will see the Minister about getting some of the black spot funding for a roundabout.

In conclusion, I thank my campaign team, particularly Dick and Helen Quinn, Katrina Carlon and the hundreds of volunteers. I also thank Ben Franklin, who is sitting in the gallery, together with Douglas Martin, who was in charge of my area and the rest of The Nationals team. I thank my partner, Sue, and daughter, Kathryn, who worked tirelessly during the campaign. Thank you to my daughters, Nicole, Caroline and Victoria, and to family and friends who travelled from Sydney to assist. I thank also the many helpers at the markets and the booth workers. I thank the House for the courtesy and attention afforded to me today.