




Speech by

Andrew Cripps

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

Hansard Wednesday, 15 June 2011

MOTION OF CONDOLENCE: EATON, MR AG

 **Mr CRIPPS** (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (9.45 am): I rise to contribute to the condolence motion for Andrew George Eaton, known as Bill. Before the first state election held on the new boundaries following the recommendations of the Electoral and Administrative Review Commission in 1992, the rural communities along the coast between the provincial cities of Townsville and Cairns in North Queensland were divided into three seats, being Mulgrave, Hinchinbrook and Mourilyan. Each of these seats also included hinterland communities now located in the electorate of Dalrymple.

Bill Eaton was elected as the Labor member for Mourilyan at the 1980 state election, defeating National Party member Vicky Kippin, who had held the seat since 1974. When the Goss Labor government won the election in December 1989, Bill Eaton became the minister for land management. This was an appropriate appointment for Bill, who had a very strong interest in regional and rural areas of Queensland and the industries that existed there. The redistribution of state electorates based on the EARC recommendations saw the abolition of a number of rural and regional seats, including Bill's seat of Mourilyan. The communities in the former electorate of Mourilyan were then divided between the electorates of Mulgrave, Tablelands and Hinchinbrook, which continue to this day—the Tablelands being represented by the member for Dalrymple.

The people in the communities in my electorate who were previously located in the electorate of Mourilyan continue to hold Bill Eaton in high esteem. Moving throughout my community, people will still recall how Bill represented them well in this House. Conservative people will express their respect for Bill and quite a number will admit to voting for him notwithstanding his politics. That is the mark of a local member who has earned the affection of his constituents.

In 1992 Bill Eaton stood as the Labor candidate for the seat of Hinchinbrook but was defeated by the National Party candidate Marc Rowell, who is my predecessor in this place. The election was, however, a very close-run thing, with the National Party's margin being only 2½ per cent. Bill commanded very significant support in the areas previously located in his former electorate of Mourilyan.

I met Bill Eaton on several occasions, and in recent years Bill became a constituent of mine, living on a property at Mount Fox, a small rural community located at the top of the Great Dividing Range west of Ingham. I last saw Bill before he passed away on Christmas Eve last at the vigil mass at St Clare's Catholic Church in Tully. Although he had been battling for some time with his health, he was in good spirits and we enjoyed friendly conversation about his family and about life.

I know that Bill continued to command a great deal of respect in the local community well after he left public life. When I first contested the seat of Hinchinbrook for the National Party in 2006, I came across Bill Eaton handing out how-to-vote cards for Labor at the polling booth in the town of Mourilyan, just south of Innisfail. I lost the booth at Mourilyan badly on primary votes at that election. I watched helplessly as many of my prospective constituents made a beeline for Bill Eaton, had a cheerful chat and took a Labor how-to-vote card. At the 2009 election, without Bill handing out how-to-vote cards at that booth, I won the booth at Mourilyan comfortably. I am also aware that Bill Eaton is remembered fondly by long-serving staff here at Parliament House, and on several occasions they have asked after Bill Eaton, as he was a constituent of mine at the time.

Bill was a warm, earthy and charming man. He was a man of faith in God and the traditional values of the Labor Party. It was well known that Bill was very concerned about some of the policies of his old party. He was particularly vocal about his concerns in relation to the closure of the timber industry in North Queensland that occurred following the declaration of vast tracts of land as World Heritage areas. This decision by the federal Labor government of the day badly affected a number of communities in my electorate as well as a number of hinterland communities in Bill's former electorate of Mourilyan, now represented by the member for Dalrymple.

The Bill Eaton Bridge over the South Johnstone River, located just south of the town of South Johnstone and just south of the South Johnstone Mill, stands as a constant reminder of Bill's commitment to improving the circumstances of the people he represented. Bill Eaton will be fondly remembered by the people in my electorate whom he represented as the member for Mourilyan for 12 years, spanning four terms in the Queensland parliament. The member for Mulgrave will be aware that from time to time our performances as local members are compared to the record of Bill Eaton by our constituents in the areas that were previously part of the Mourilyan electorate, and that keeps us on our toes.

My predecessor, Marc Rowell, attended Bill Eaton's funeral in Atherton, such was his respect for the man who contested the 1992 state election against him. Marc asked me to place on the record during this condolence motion some remarks on his behalf—

Due to a redistribution, part of the Mourilyan Electorate had been added to the Hinchinbrook Electorate for the 1992 state election. Bill was Minister for Land Management in the Goss Government. Due to the new boundaries and the abolition of Mourilyan as an electorate, Bill nominated to contest Hinchinbrook which included his home town of Innisfail.

After serving only one term in state parliament, the prospects of contesting the seat against a Minister and a popular member of parliament were daunting. I can recall the not uncommon mud slinging and innuendo of electioneering never entered the contest. I believe Bill was true blue to the philosophy of the Labor Party.

I met Bill on several occasions after the election. Nothing had changed his salutations and cheery demeanour. I had a great deal of respect for Bill's no frills way he addressed the many endeavours he faced, but none more than the challenge of raising a family after the passing of his wife when the family was young.

I am certain that those who knew him in the current parliament would agree with these sentiments. This was evident by the broad spectrum of people who attended his funeral in Atherton recently.

Both Marc Rowell and I offer our sincere condolences to the family of the late Bill Eaton, a proud North Queenslander who strongly represented his electorate in this place. Although Bill and I are from different political parties, he is certainly a man whom I respected and whom many locals of longstanding in my electorate respected.