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Scenic Rim Region
SPEECH

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Speaker Boyce, Sen Sue

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Senator BOYCE (Queensland) (6.45 pm)—I would like to tell the Senate tonight about a recent visit I made to the Scenic Rim region in Queensland. When we talk about tourist icons of Australia, the Scenic Rim region of Queensland probably is not top of mind, not even for Queenslanders. But this beautiful region very much should be. In fact the Mayor of the Scenic Rim Regional Council, Councillor John Brent, proudly points out that the region has recently been listed by Tourism Australia as one of the most scenic regions of Australia—‘Right up there with the Great Ocean Road,’ as Mayor Brent comments.

The Scenic Rim region is barely one hour’s drive from the Brisbane CBD. It has a current population of 35,000 and takes in the former shires of Boonah and Beaudesert. The Scenic Rim includes the historic areas of Canungra, Mount Tamborine, Kalbar, Aratula, Beechmont and Rathdowney—all names that I am sure are familiar to Queenslanders but should be more familiar to all Australians. However, despite its physical beauty, the Scenic Rim is a struggling region. Firstly, it struggles with the bizarre shape given it by the recent Bligh government council amalgamations. The new council has an area of 4,250 square kilometres. It is larger than the combined area of the Gold Coast, Logan, Ipswich and Redland city councils. So its sheer size is a challenge for the new council.

Secondly, as I have already noted, it has a small population. Despite being on Brisbane’s doorstep, the Scenic Rim currently has a population of only 35,000 and consequently a relatively small revenue base of \$53 million this year and a projected income of \$58 million next year. The state Labor government amalgamation, which does in fact seem to have singled out the Scenic Rim for some sort of special victim status, has left the council stuck in a classic catch 22 situation. They do not have the income to develop their infrastructure; without their infrastructure they cannot increase their population and their rate base.

Thirdly, the Scenic Rim region has a desperate need for additional infrastructure. They need the additional infrastructure for future development, but until they get funding to do that development they will not be able to afford the infrastructure, and so we go around in circles. Nevertheless, on my recent visit to the Scenic Rim region I was struck by the very brave and

confident attitude of this community and its leaders. The council are anticipating that they will have a very small debt at the end of the year of about \$3,500—an amazing effort in the circumstances.

I would like to now look at some of those infrastructure needs, starting with the roads. There are, in a region of this size, of course a lot of roads. Of the 1,688 kilometres of roads that run through the region, only about half are sealed. A total of 814 kilometres of the roads in the region are unsealed. One of the biggest problems for the region is the very large number of old, underrated timber bridges. They have lots of beautiful scenery and lots of beautiful creeks, but that means that they have 143 bridges and only 35 of those are concrete. There are 105 timber bridges, many of them dating back to early settlement times. So when construction trucks try to reach these newly planned state government developments around the region, they will be using timber bridges and unsealed roads to do so—not a very satisfactory situation.

Right now, 4½ million tonnes of sand, soil and rock a year are transported through Beaudesert’s main street because there is no alternative. The council has proposed a six-kilometre bypass to take this traffic out of the centre of town, but it needs \$20 million in funding to do so. The council has had no response to its request from the state or federal level for that \$20 million, which represents virtually half of the yearly revenue of the council. The state government, after ignoring areas like the Scenic Rim, has thrown the Boonah and Beaudesert councils together and said, ‘Now you work it out.’

On my way to the region’s main centre, Beaudesert, I visited the township of Kalbar. Kalbar is in many ways the typical Queensland country town. On Anzac Day, just about the whole population of 600 turns out for the morning service. But Kalbar is being seriously affected by the expansion and growth of greater Brisbane. One development at Kalbar that was originally planned for 79 houses has now expanded to 153 development lots. That is close to doubling the population of the town and impacts, of course, on current roads, shopping amenities and sewerage systems. This is just a microcosm of what is happening locally.

The state government have some wonderful developments planned for all around the Scenic Rim

—not in the Scenic Rim but around it. Last month they approved a residential development at Ripley Valley near Ipswich that is projected to bring 100,000 residents to the area. This will not benefit the Scenic Rim area, although it will further clog the roads of the region.

Developments for 60,000 residents are also planned at both Yarrabilba and Flagstone. They again are in the Logan and Ipswich council areas, not the Scenic Rim's. Even in this area the state government is not doing the job it should be doing to support councils in developing the infrastructure needed for this massive growth. You can plan to have great population growth, but if you just leave it to the councils to work out what they are going to do with the roads, the bridges, the schools, the sewerage systems et cetera that are needed to support this population growth, you are looking at a recipe for disaster. The councils are the ones currently bearing the brunt of the lack of infrastructure planning by the government.

The Scenic Rim does include, though, the Bromelton state development area. It covers 16,000 hectares and it is the largest privately funded industrial park planned anywhere in Australia. Bromelton will be South-East Queensland's inland port. It will act as a hub for road, rail and sea connections. The formal declaration of the area as a state development area was made on 28 August. The actual development of the area itself is expected to generate 18,000 jobs by 2026. At that time the population of Beaudesert is expected to exceed 30,000. These are conservative estimates.

I very much support the development of the Bromelton area. I support proper planning for industry, buffer zones that minimise impact and an effective transport logistics that will reduce the distance needed to be covered by transport that will feed the whole of the greater Brisbane area in the 2020s.

I note that companies including Australand, Specialised Container Transport and York Developments, in association with Patrick Corporation, Pacific National and Toll Holdings, are the active participants in the Bromelton area in conjunction with the Scenic Rim Council. They are developing freight handling for Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne to and from the Port of Brisbane.

Bromelton is probably the only area available for future industrial development in South-East Queensland that currently has access to the national standard-gauge rail network, and it will be a major link in the proposed Melbourne to Brisbane rail link that is currently under investigation by the Australian

Rail Track Corporation, which is due to report back by August 2009.

Bromelton is being developed specifically for high-impact industries with particular emphasis on industries requiring large buffer zones and separation from residential areas. It has close access to the Mt Lindesay Highway, making it suitable for major road freight operations and logistics services. In short, it will be a significant major national infrastructure project. But it is taking place in a regional area on a scale that overwhelms any previous development.

I took the opportunity when I was in the Scenic Rim region to inspect some of the site with the council—*(Time expired)*

Senator BOYCE—I seek leave to have the remainder of my speech incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

The remainder of the speech read as follows—

I took the opportunity to inspect some of the site with the Council and Mr Graeme Newton, CEO of Qld Water Infrastructure. I would like to thank Mayor John Brent, and Councillors Derek Swanborough, Richard Adams, Virginia West, Dave Cockburn, Kathy Benstead and Heather Wehl for their hospitality.

We saw a proposed development area near the newly-constructed 8,000 megalitre offstream storage site. This is an area of a few hundred hectares that will be flattened and levelled, requiring an adjustment of up to 10 metres in land height. Just shifting that much soil is a major undertaking and this is just one section of the first stage of the development.

This is an indication of the sheer scale of development in the area, and why it must be supported with necessary, and overdue, infrastructure funding. The Queensland Government can no longer issue press releases about the number of people moving to Queensland each week—as the former Premier did—and not consider that they might need water, or schools, or police, or hospitals.

We need to plan our dams and desalination plants now—just as we need to train our doctors, nurses, police and teachers.

In the long term Queensland and Australia will benefit—and in the short term our Federal and State Governments need to shoulder some of the cost now.