



Central Bulletin

A newsletter from Central Queensland's only Senator, Matthew Canavan

THE NATIONALS
for Regional Australia

LNP | LIBERAL NATIONAL PARTY

**Australia needs
more stored water**

**Rural debt looms
over landholders**

**Open highway,
full agenda**

**We must support people
working hard at the
frontiers of our nation**



Number 1, November 2014

We must support people working hard at the frontiers of our nation

This is a lightly edited transcript of my maiden speech to the Senate, delivered on 16 July 2014

I AM honoured to give my first speech in the Senate and I am honoured to have been elected by the Queensland people to represent them. I will do my best to serve their collective interests with courage, integrity and humility. It is a privilege to follow a great friend of mine, Senator McGrath, and I just want to put on record at the start that there are lots of people here tonight, but most of them are here at his calling. They have come here for him, and I say: “Good on you, James, for being able to get more people to come along to the Senate to see a speech than go to the average Raiders game here in Canberra!”

In my time here, I want to make sure that all Australians can choose their own job, buy their own home, start their own business or have their own family. For each small Australian to be big, they must be free from big government, big banks, big unions and big corporations. I believe that the best way we can give Australians that independence is to keep taxes low, make it easy to employ someone, promote property rights, protect the family and continue to develop the “plains extended” of our vast continent.

I have been lucky to have two wonderful parents, Bryan and Maria, who are here tonight, my brother and sister, John and Emma, who are also here, and my grandma Val Canavan. I will never forget the hours upon hours of playing cricket in our backyard in Logan, just south of Brisbane. My dad built us a full-length concrete cricket pitch. He boxed up the pitch himself and he even started mixing the concrete in a wheelbarrow. Very soon, a few yards into the full 22, he realised that was a bit silly and he ordered in a cement truck. I joke now that, while my dad is very proud that I have been elected a Senator for Queensland, there is still a tinge of disappointment that I did not reach my true calling to wear the baggy green for Australia.

I have been lucky to meet my beautiful wife, Andrea, and I feel so blessed to have one person who I can share everything with – the ups and downs, the moves all around the countryside and most of all our three beautiful sons: William, Jack and Henry. We are expecting our fourth child very soon, and, just in case anyone is wondering, the due date is not nine months from election night.

As a Senator for Queensland, I represent the entire state. However, I am passionate that the Senate should strive to represent regional areas in particular.

To create a stronger regional Queensland, we need to:

- support our job-producing industries;
- protect the small against the powerful;
- promote property ownership; and
- help families have children.

These principles were reflected in my first speech in the Senate.



I started talking about my family tonight because that is the reason I got involved in politics. I wanted to do something where my children could see the differences that I was making. So, one day when I was sitting in front of a computer at the Productivity Commission, I cold-called Tony Abbott's office and asked if he needed an economist. His office did not, but Barnaby did, so I ended up with him.

I did not know Barnaby then, but I met someone I very quickly grew to respect enormously. You get to know your bosses very quickly in politics. A few months in, we were working on an election campaign and one night right in the middle of the campaign we were sharing a particularly comfy room together where the two single beds would have been at most half a metre apart. We tucked ourselves in for the night, and then I remembered that I had not called my wife. So I got out my phone and I texted my wife: “Hi, babe. Love you. Miss you lots.” At least I thought that text went to my wife. Instead, I had been texting Barnaby so much that it went to him by mistake.

More seriously, in the words of TE Lawrence, Barnaby is someone who “dreams with open eyes”, and I want to thank him for the opportunity he gave me to work for him.

I come into the Nationals party room not as your typical National Party Senator. I am not a farmer and I am not a small businessman; I am an economist who has spent most of his time working for the Productivity Commission. We are lucky to have an organisation like the Productivity Commission. There are very few

independent organisations in the world that are set up by governments to criticise governments. In my time there, Gary Banks led the organisation with consummate skill, and I thank him for taking the time to come here tonight. My first boss, Ian Gibbs, is also here, and later tonight I am expecting to receive a copy of this speech back with lots of corrections and red ink all over it.

It is an unusual path to travel from the Productivity Commission to the National Party. The predecessor bodies of the commission fought famous battles against a great leader of the Country Party, John McEwen. Those battles about protectionism are well and truly behind us. John McEwen's underlying principles and values are what we should remember today. What drove John McEwen was not a desire to impose higher tariffs but to protect the wealth-producing industries of our nation. Once again, our wealth-producing industries need support. Our agricultural, mining, manufacturing and tourism industries face high taxes, over-regulation and, most of all, a complacency that they will keep producing wealth regardless of what we do in this place.

While I was at the Productivity Commission, I was constantly reminded of how important it is to get the costs of business down. We spent 30 years in Australia removing tariffs to reduce business costs, deregulating financial markets to reduce business costs and reforming our energy sector to reduce business costs. It is now often forgotten how successful that was. From 1990 to the mid-2000s, electricity costs fell by 27% in

real terms for businesses. For the past half a decade, we have followed the opposite approach. We have imposed a carbon tax and a renewable energy target that increased business costs, and we have unwound many of the improvements to industrial relations that provided a way to link greater productivity to higher wages. We have gone from having some of the cheapest power prices in the world to now being just above average. Just seven years ago, businesses in Australia paid less than 10c per kilowatt hour for electricity. Today, many pay more than 20c per kilowatt hour. In the United States, businesses pay the same prices that we did just a few years ago.

We have very similar resources to the United States – abundant supplies of coal and gas – but we give up our natural advantage in wealth and job creation when we turn our back on them. I want to put on the record my admiration and support for our fossil fuel industry and the thousands of jobs it supports, including my brother's. Fossil fuels have made more contribution than almost any other product or invention towards humanity's long ascent from lives that were nasty, brutish and short to ones of comparative luxury and leisure.

The only form of energy that I want to promote is cheap energy, because we have a choice: we can either have cheap energy or we will get cheap wages. To get cheaper energy, we need to rediscover that the whole point of providing infrastructure is for the users of infrastructure, not the owners. We have made a mistake in putting the profits of electricity and gas networks ahead of lower prices for end consumers, businesses and families. We need a new national productivity agenda to bring down the costs of doing business, to boost productivity and to create well-paying jobs. Higher productivity is the only viable way to lift our standard of living over the long term.

While I am an economist, our national debate is sometimes driven too much by economists. There are lots of truths in Adam Smith; there are also lots of truths in Aristotle, Aquinas, Hobbes, Rousseau and Rawls. Just because something does not have a price does not mean it has no value. In the National Party, we believe that small is beautiful. Small farms and small businesses allow more Australians to have a stake in their country. Smaller towns provide for greater community spirit and the smallest social unit of society, the family, is the most important one for us all. As Aristotle noted, the nature of everything is best seen in its smallest portions.

The fundamental mistake of the National Competition Policy was the view you only needed the potential competition of a few big firms to deliver the benefits of

actual competition from many small firms. The lived experience of potential competition has not delivered the goods. Farmers struggle to achieve a return on assets of more than two per cent, while our major supermarkets and banks make returns regularly of more than 10%. It is not right that the people who produce and grow our food make returns so much lower than the people who sell our food. Our competition laws are too focused on protecting against monopoly power – but just as economically ruinous can be too much buying power, or monopsony.

It is probably a bigger issue, monopsony, for our economy because we are of a relatively small size, we have highly concentrated markets and we are a long way from potential overseas buyers. Apple growers in Stanthorpe rely heavily on the major supermarkets; sugar growers generally only have one mill to sell to; and grain growers, despite selling all around the world, have limited means to transport their product to market. Yet Australia's seminal legal textbook on competition laws does not mention the word monopsony, or buying power, once. This is not a criticism of the authors; they are simply reflecting the state of our laws and our jurisprudence. Too-low prices can be just as detrimental as too-high prices because they lead to lower supply and reduce incentives to invest in new technologies. To protect small businesses, we need stronger competition laws. We need an effects test in the Trade Practices Act. We need low-cost arbitration processes and stronger penalties for dominant businesses that do the wrong thing.

We should encourage as many Australians as possible to own property. Owning property gives you both individual freedom and a collective stake in the

defence of our nation, its liberties and its rights. One of the greatest days of my life was the day my wife and I got the keys to our first home. I remember that night well – we had pizza on the floor of our home. We had no furniture in it yet, but we were monarchs in a room of our own with rights that no-one could dispute.

But home ownership is becoming increasingly out of reach for my generation. Unreasonable restrictions on land release are part of the reason, but these are largely state issues. At the federal level, we make it harder for young people to buy their own home by forcing them to put 9.5% of their income into a savings account they may not be able to access until they are 65. I wanted to own a home when I was 25, not 65. Why make people save for retirement before they can own their own home? We should free up the rules around superannuation so that young people can use their income and their savings to buy their first home.

Property rights generally are under attack in Australia. The states should have the right to promote and protect public health, safety, welfare and morals; but governments across Australia are abusing this right. Farmers have had their right to clear land taken from them. Fishermen have had their right to fish restricted. Local councils are enforcing draconian restrictions on what can be done in self-defined green zones and landowners have more ability to keep their mother-in-law off their property than a mining company. By the way – hi, Joan, thanks for coming down!

In all of these cases, the Government is not acquiring property from landowners but the Government is regulating its use to such an extent that it is effectively taken from private hands. Under our Constitution, property owners only have



Australians should be encouraged to buy their own home.

compensation rights for the acquisition of property, not for the taking of it by means of regulation. Our Constitution differs from the Fifth Amendment to the US Constitution in this regard. American courts have developed a detailed case law on regulatory takings that defines when government decisions amount to a taking and therefore trigger a compensation claim.

The private individual should not pay for the public good. If the public seeks greater protections, then it should be willing to pay just compensation for them. We should look at providing the same protections as exist in the United States here, either through our own constitutional change or an act of parliament. Property rights are important because they help protect the basic unit of our society, the family. Property delivers security and permanence and that encourages people to make the biggest investment decision of their lives: the decision to have children. I support a tax system that recognises the family. Family tax benefits are not welfare – they are due recognition that families face higher unavoidable costs and therefore deserve taxation relief. But not all families are treated equally under our tax system. Two Australian households that earn the same amount of joint household income can pay vastly different amounts of tax.

Take a household of two children where both parents work full time and each earns \$60,000 per year. Their total household income is \$120,000 and they pay about \$24,000 a year in tax. Compare that with a household, also with two children, where only one parent works and earns \$120,000 per year. They have the same household income, yet this household pays about \$34,000 per year in tax – \$10,000 per year more than the double-income household. Putting it another way, a double-income family could potentially earn up to \$215,000 a year before they pay the same average tax rate as a single-income family on just \$120,000 a year. This is unfair. People with similar ways and means should pay similar amounts of tax. Other countries, including the United States, Germany and France, allow parents to split income for tax purposes. The Canadian government has promised to introduce income splitting once their budget has returned to surplus. We too should have a goal of correcting the injustice for single-income families once our budget returns to surplus under a Coalition government.

The great reform efforts in industrial relations over the past 200 years were all aimed at reducing the time we spend at work, and I recognise the efforts of the Labor Party in bringing many of these achievements about. But it is a backward

One of my first trips with Barnaby Joyce was to Cubbie Station. Late one night, as we were coming home after a drink at the Dirranbandi Hotel, we got talking about climate change, the ETS and all that. I said to him that what I could not understand while working at the Productivity Commission was why the renewable energy target had bipartisan support, even though it was clearly the most costly policy because it made poor people pay rich people to invest in wind farms or to put solar panels on their roofs. At this, Barnaby riled up and said that it was not the policy of the National Party, and of Ron Boswell, in particular. That was my introduction to Bozzie. There is no-one like Ron Boswell, and I certainly cannot replace him alone. It is up to all



Ron Boswell

of us in the Nationals Senate party room—Nigel, Fiona, Wacka, Bridget and Barry—to follow Ron's example and take up the fight for the causes we may not want to fight for and we may not think we can fight for, but we know we must.

step in modern times that we now try to maximise the number of people in work. For most of us, what we achieve in the home will far outweigh our achievements at work. My wife and I have made the decision that she would stay at home and look after our children while they were young. Even so, she too feels the modern pressure to enter paid work because, as it works now, unless you are in paid work you are not contributing. That view is rubbish. Whatever I achieve in my professional career, including in this place, will not matter a jot compared with the achievements and legacy of my wife. When we are 64, enjoying a bottle of wine, what we will reflect on is our children and, God willing, our grandchildren. My wife will have a greater impact on that outcome, because I spend too much time at work.

My son came home from school the other day with one of those posters of himself with his picture on it and questions about what he likes and does not like. He said his favourite thing to do was to 'tackle daddy'. Henry, I hope I find the time in this job so you can keep tackling me enough. Andrea, if you want to tackle me from time to time, that is okay, too.

Mr President, you would be aware of the hardships we Senators face. Unlike our colleagues in the other place, we sometimes have to wait up to 10 months before taking our seat in Parliament! But it is not all bad. I used some of my time to spend a few weeks working in a stock camp in the Gulf of Carpentaria. I went there to learn about cattle, but I came away learning more about people. I learnt about the young Australians that get off their backsides and work hard in a place thousands of kilometres from their friends and their family, often for not very much money.

I want to thank Brendan Menegazzo,

Tony McCormack and John O'Kane for making this happen. I also want to thank Tom and Tanya Arnold, the property managers at Miranda, for their kindness and hospitality; and Tess Cox, the head stock woman, and her team for finding nice quiet horses for me to ride on, even if that did not stop me falling off.

I hope that in my time here I can make decisions that do not make their lives any more difficult, because we want people to follow them and go to the frontiers of our nation, work hard and build something better. I want to make it easier for them to get to town on a Friday night on decent roads. I want to let them pay tax that reflects the level of public services that exist 100 kilometres from Normanton – which isn't very much. I want to let them enjoy the simple pleasures of living that life – which include fishing, rum and coke, pigging, and, for some, cigarettes – without putting up taxes every year or regulating every little risky enjoyment in life.

I am proud to have been elected as the 10th Liberal National Party senator and the 52nd Nationals or Country Party Senator. I have been a member of both the Liberal and National parties separately. In Queensland, we are a stronger unit for combining the great principles and people of these two great parties. I want to thank all the members of the LNP for the work they did to help me be here. I am always humbled to see so many people work for free to help me get a well-paying job. Getting elected to the Senate is a team effort. I want to thank, like James did, the great work that Senator Ian McDonald did in leading our team at last year's election – and, of course, James as well for his work. But also most of all to our other candidates David Goodwin, Theresa Craig and Amanda Stoker who put in tireless amounts of work, travelling a big

state to help us all be here.

Many from the LNP have travelled down to be here tonight, but I want to particularly thank Bruce McIver and the hard work of his executive and office team. I also want to pay tribute to Brad Henderson, who could not be here tonight because they work so hard they have another election this Saturday and they are up in Brisbane.

I pray to God that He can help me meet the expectations I have set here. I pray that I can contribute to the Senate in ways that respect and build on its great legacy. I pray that I can work with a government that returns Australia to the path of balanced budgets; returns Australia to a path where opportunity and security increases every year; and, most of all, a place where all Australians find their own independence and freedom to live the lives they want to lead. I look forward to working with every one of you for the benefit of all Queenslanders and all Australians. Thank you and God bless.



It was an honour to deliver my first speech in the Senate on July 16.

James McGrath stands for power to the people

MY friend and Senate colleague James McGrath made his first speech in Parliament the same night as I did and nailed his colours to the mast: he is a strong believer in individual liberty and small government.

In his speech, James reminded us that World War I had begun a century ago but, in some senses, was still being fought.

“Freedom and liberty, 100 years ago this month, were under threat as the gods of war awoke,” he said. “Armies of empires stretching back before the Middle Ages were slowly moving to Armageddon – a world war with deaths of millions, the end of four royal houses and the beginning of wicked new orders of communist and fascist cruelty. This war ended realms of geography but brought in dominions of political terror imprisoning generations under dictatorship, ending hope, freedom and liberty for many until the collapse of the Soviet Union.

“Indeed, the war that began in 1914 with the invasion of Belgium was the second 'Hundred Years War', the war against tyranny, continuing from the Armistice, pausing in 1989, and resuming in 2001 in New York. The 'Hundred Years War against Tyranny' continues today on three fronts: first of all, Islamist fundamentalism intent on caliphates destroying Western civilisation, especially religious freedom; secondly, democratic governments restricting freedom of speech and association, betraying hundreds of years of liberty; and, finally, leftists delegitimising all views other than



Senator James McGrath

their own, especially in media and education.

“Freedom and liberty are not abstract concepts. You either have freedom or you are not free. Whether I serve here for 16 days or 16 years, I shall always judge myself on how I have battled against tyranny and fought for the axis of enlightenment – that is, liberty of the individual, a free market, small government and low taxes. I will let others badge and brand and box me, as, in my great broad church that is the Liberal National Party, my pew is a moveable feast. I have campaigned against dictator-loving Islamist fundamentalists in the Maldives; Sinn Fein-

and PLO-supporting Labour candidates in London; and godless rebranded communists in Mongolia – not to mention the Queensland branch of the Australian Labor Party!

“My life has not been about the pursuit or gain of power but to confiscate power back from government to free people.”

You can read James' first Senate speech on the Hansard website at www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Parliamentarian?MPID=217241 and learn more about James' current activities on his website www.jamesmcgrath.com.au.

Australia needs more stored water

AUSTRALIA needs new dams. They will boost the nation's economy and create new jobs by generating expanded agriculture and mining projects and allowing growth in our towns and cities.

I am so passionate about the need for new dams that I personally have inspected 10 sites for dams or water storages in Queensland over the past two months.

We have not built a major dam in Australia for more than 20 years. Back then, we could store more than four years' supply of water. Today, we can store only three years' supply and, if we do nothing for the next 30 years, it will be down to two years.

One of the reasons we haven't built dams is a green agenda that puts green issues above everything else. A proposed dam on the Dawson, the Nathan Dam, has been held up for years because of a Boggomoss snail community, even though these snails are abundant in the region.

There's no shortage of good sites for dams in Queensland, and a number already have their environmental approvals and could be proceeded with at short notice.

The big question is how we are going to pay for them. So, I am pleased to see that a National Water Infrastructure Roundtable convened by Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce on October 29 examined this question.

In early October, I flew over Central Queensland from Rockhampton to Moranbah to Emerald and back to Rockhampton – with fellow CQ LNP MPs Michelle Landry and Ken O'Dowd – to inspect dam sites, including the site of the proposed Connors River Dam on the Fitzroy system.

Later in the month, I inspected the site of the proposed Emu Swamp Dam near Stanthorpe, and followed this with a tour of areas proposed for new water storage projects in north-west Queensland.

It's a simple fact: Australia needs new dams. Storing water is like putting money in the bank. If we are going to pay back Australia's debt, we need to invest in infrastructure projects, like dams, that will produce wealth in the future.

The Coalition Government has the goal of building a strong and prosperous economy, including a stable agricultural sector – and, to achieve that, the resource agriculture needs above all else is water.

In Central Queensland, we've got the water and we've got the projects. All we've really lacked is the political will to make it happen. Now we have a PM who's got the vision and determination to make infrastructure projects like these dams a reality.

Campaign for infrastructure

The flight I made over CQ dam sites recently is part of a campaign for major infrastructure projects in Central Queensland.

Along with Michelle Landry (Member for Capricornia) and Ken O'Dowd (Member for Flynn), I saw sites for new or expanded water storage works from

the air, and then landed at Moranbah and Emerald to talk with local communities about opportunities in the region.

Many areas across Queensland are doing it tough but the slowdown in the mining sector is hurting Central Queensland in particular. Action is needed to boost the economy in Central Queensland and infrastructure projects like dams could play an important role.

That's why we took a firsthand look at potential water projects. Water is wealth and, if we can store more water, we can create more jobs. Despite some tough times in CQ right now, I have a very positive and optimistic outlook for the region's future.

For example, there are new mines set to open. The Carmichael mine received



Water needs were discussed at the Isaac Regional Council offices in Moranbah.



We also talked water with the Central Highlands Regional Council in Emerald.



Water stored by Fairbairn Dam...



...irrigates valuable crops around Emerald.

Federal Government approval a few months ago and would provide 10,000 jobs alone in the Galilee Basin. It is a great opportunity. It is going to be one of the biggest areas for coal mining. It is probably the best area in the world for new coal mines. It is a great thing for Queensland to have.

Projects like the Connors River Dam can provide essential water to the Galilee Basin, the Carmichael mine project and others, and we looked at that site, along with Rookwood, Eden Bann, The Gap, Fairbairn and Theresa Creek.

Raising the wall at Eden Bann Weir and building Rookwood Weir could generate large-scale development of horticultural crops for export to Asia. This would be part of a Fitzroy Agricultural Corridor in an area between the junction of the Dawson and McKenzie Rivers and encompassing the Fitzroy River and the Fitzroy River Barrage.

We are looking at projects as a Central Queensland LNP team, including George Christensen from Dawson. We will take the ideas from our direct visits to communities and consultations with the Queensland Government down to Canberra in a report to senior Ministers, including Treasurer Joe Hockey and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure & Regional Development Warren Truss.

Need for dams is on the table

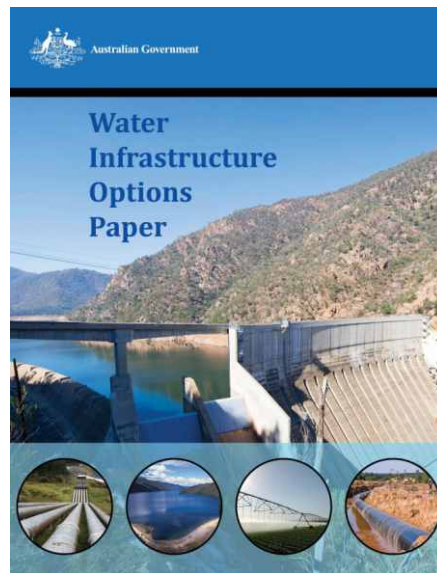
THE need for new dams throughout Australia – and particularly in Queensland – has been recognised at a National Water Infrastructure Roundtable in October.

I welcomed the opportunity to join more than 80 water experts in the meeting convened by Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce to talk through the opportunities and barriers for investment in water infrastructure and dams in Australia.

Barnaby's roundtable brought together people involved in water infrastructure from across the country – including investors, representatives of irrigators, mining and power industries, financiers, state and territory governments, local governments, and construction companies.

“We have before us some great opportunities to build capacity in water infrastructure,” he said.

“Today is about inviting investors and banks to meet key stakeholders and discuss investment options. It's an important first step in getting these nation-building projects off the ground.



“We know water is wealth and stored water is a bank. Water is a vital resource for Australia but we need to strategically plan our future water infrastructure so we can better utilise this precious resource to drive prosperity and improve sustainability in rural industries and regional economies.

“If no new dams are built in the future, Australia's water storage capacity will fall to 2.6 megalitres per person by 2050. This is a serious issue for us all and one that the Coalition Government is committed to tackling.”

On the same day, the Minister also released the Options Paper from the Water Infrastructure Ministerial Working Group.

The Working Group identified 27 projects which should be a priority to progress, from 63 projects submitted by the states and territories and identified by the Working Group.

The shortlist of priority projects identified by the working group was included in the Agricultural Competitiveness Green Paper, also launched in October.

PM on side

Prime Minister Tony Abbott is also onside when it comes to building new dams, telling Parliament on October 30 that the Coalition Government is determined to end the “dam phobia” that has largely stopped the construction of new dams for the past three decades.

Delivering a statement on infrastructure to the House of Representatives, the PM said: “Water is a priceless asset, especially when the vagaries of our environment make it so scarce. Strengthening our water storage capability is essential if our country is to grow.

“We do need to build the right dams in the right places. And ... most of these dams should be feasible without government support. But we are looking at some modest seed funding to help break the anti-dam mindset.”

“Family-friendly” taxation reform needed

AUSTRALIA needs tax reform and at the top of the list should be ending the inequity that penalises households where one partner stays at home to care for the children.

I recently gave a speech in the Senate outlining why I think our tax system needs to serve single-income families better. Our tax system is increasingly not doing a good job at supporting parents in this crucial time of a parent's and a child's life.

To care for a newborn, families need a tax system that recognises being a parent is the most full-time job in the world. As a result, families with young children are likely to have skewed earning patterns, with one parent earning all or most of the income.

Consider the following facts.

- Australia has one of the most hostile tax systems in the world for single-income families.
- A single-income household with annual income of \$120,000 pays \$10,000 more tax in Australia than a double-income family with the same joint income of \$120,000.
- A single-income family on \$120,000 pays the same average tax rate as a double-income family on \$215,000.
- An OECD report based on 2010 data showed that – of the 37 countries examined – Australia had the fifth most discriminatory tax system against single-income families (behind Finland, Ireland, Mexico and New Zealand).
- The OECD report showed Australian single-income families paid 38% more tax than dual-income families – while the OECD average was 21% more tax.

Things are getting worse.

- Since the OECD study referred to above was published, Australia has lifted its tax-free threshold to \$18,200.
- Single-income families by definition can access only one tax-free threshold and therefore now suffer an even greater tax disadvantage than double-income families accessing two tax-free thresholds.

Our tax system is moving in the wrong direction: in a direction

to match the priorities of the workplace, not of the home.

- There is no reason we should want to see the greatest number of people possible in paid work. Work is important – but not as important as family.
- What we achieve in the non-work parts of our lives – with our friends and our family – will likely be our most important achievements and legacies. There are more hours outside 9 to 5 than between 9 to 5.
- Too much of the commentary on tax reform focuses on just three “Ps”: productivity, profits and workforce participation. We need to add another “P”: parents. The tax system has a big impact on the decisions parents make. It should aim to be as neutral as possible in respect of changing those decisions.

So, what's the solution?

- Many countries that have similar income levels to Australia either treat single- and double-income couples in a neutral manner or have very low levels of discrimination.
- Around half of OECD countries have joint taxation for spouses or some joint elements that provide tax credits transferable between partners.
- The Canadian Government has committed to introducing a form of “income splitting” to allow parents to transfer \$50,000 between each other for tax purposes.

Parents instinctively know what is good for their children but when the government attempts to shift decisions about work and life balance, in favour of one or the other, worse outcomes are likely. Our tax system should better value the most precious thing in most of our lives: our children.

The Coalition Government has committed to developing a tax reform white paper. Tax reform cannot ignore the inequity of treating households that earn the same amount so vastly differently.

Change should be made because of basic principles of tax fairness and because our tax system should value that which may not be able to be measured but is the most important.





Rural debt looms over landholders

RURAL debt is a major issue in the bush. In 20 years, total rural debt has increased fivefold – up from \$13 billion in 1993 to \$64.3 billion at the end of 2013.

Much of the increased debt in the industry was taken on in a period of optimism during the mid-2000s. Asset values soared: in the north Queensland pastoral industry, property prices went up by around five times and then fell by more than a third.

An industry survey of cattle producers in the Gulf of Carpentaria region indicates the property values of respondents has dropped from an average \$6.2 million to \$3.4 million, and that there has been a 600% increase in debt held with small businesses and service providers in small towns and regional centres.

Just how serious the problem is for producers I heard firsthand at a meeting of the Agricultural Finance Forum (photo above) convened by Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce in late September to discuss the rural debt situation across the nation.

Barnaby Joyce called the meeting – which quickly became known amongst industry reps as a “rural debt roundtable” – so representatives from the banking sector, the farm sector and government could discuss face-to-face what are regarded as unsustainable debt levels due to the extended drought and the live animal export ban imposed by the then Labor Government in 2011.

We all heard the problems producers are experiencing, especially in northern Australia, where the live export ban hit hardest.

One of the most important outcomes from this forum was acknowledgement from banking representatives that there are debt problems in parts of rural Australia. That is one of the most important steps is trying to alleviate the problems and pressure many producers face.

The banking sector has agreed to provide more detailed data on the debt situation for parts of rural Queensland. The banks will also work with the Government and the farming sector to develop national debt remediation principles to replace the often ad hoc and inconsistent arrangements in some states that exist now. The Federal Government also recognised that the farm finance packages aren't working as intended and has agreed to “tweak” them.

There is no quick and easy solution. The issue of debt pre-

dates the drought and will outlast it.

There is no knight in shining armour to help solve all of the industry's issues. Governments cannot play that role because: one, there is no spare cash in Canberra; and two, it is not fair on those that did not take out debt if Canberra simply bails everyone out. It is irresponsible and ultimately counterproductive to raise hopes beyond what politicians can achieve.

Yet, in my firm view there is a role for government to work with the industry, to work with banks, to help work through these issues. Governments can help people and banks adjust to a changed environment through re-negotiated terms and assistance packages. They will never remove all pain for people but they can help transform businesses from a high-debt, nowhere-to-go situation to one in which debt is manageable and they have a future to work towards.

The debt situation is a national issue too. If we want our beef industry to respond to the burgeoning demand in Asia, we need them to be flexible enough to do so. Being in too much debt is like having your feet stuck in wet concrete but we need people to have the confidence and the ability to restock their properties when prices lift again.

Assistance available

THERE is a range of government support available to farmers in need, including Farm Household Allowance, Farm Finance Concessional Loans and Drought Concessional Loans.

Specifically in response to the drought, a total of \$430 million in loan funding has been made available, and these loans have supported some. In Queensland, 97% of the funds allocated last year have been lent to farmers.

For more information, visit agriculture.gov.au/assistance or call the Farmer Assistance Hotline 13 23 16 (Monday to Friday, 8 am to 8 pm local time).

Open highway, full agenda on north-west road trip

AS a Senator for Queensland, and someone with a passion and very positive attitude towards rural and regional Queensland in particular, I want to visit as much of the State as possible and hear firsthand about the challenges and opportunities outside the south-east corner.

My first extended tour was a four-day road trip west on the Flinders and Barkly Highways from Townsville to Mount Isa, stopping overnight in Charters Towers, Julia Creek and Mount Isa, and also visiting Hughenden, Richmond and Cloncurry. It was a listening tour and locals had plenty to tell me.

Meetings included stock and station agents in Charters Towers, people involved in the live cattle trade at the Dalrymple saleyards, the North Queensland Motor Sports Club, the Charters Towers Regional Council and community groups over dinner, and there was opportunity to inspect the site of a flying fox colony in the middle of town, something that brings with it a host of amenity and environmental issues.

The next day, I headed 250 km west to Hughenden to meet with the Flinders Shire Council and then with community groups. Issues there included the need for continued funding of the Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative (GABSI) and sealing of gravel sections of the Hann Highway, which would provide a faster, more direct route between Far North Queensland and Melbourne-Adelaide.

After lunch, a hundred-plus kms took me to Richmond and a meeting with the Richmond Shire Council, where drought and irrigated agriculture were included on the agenda.

Another 150 km – making it just over 500 km for the day – got me to Julia Creek for a late afternoon roundtable with the McKinlay Shire Council and discussions with regional residents over dinner. One of the hot topics there is the NBN rollout, where the cable is planned to virtually come through town but not be available for local plug-in, with a satellite service likely to be provided instead. (I am having ongoing discussions with Communications Minister Malcolm Turnbull about this situation and he has been very helpful.)

Not long after sunup the next morning, it was a comparatively short hop (130km) down the road to Cloncurry for a



From top: My road tour from Townsville to Mt Isa included a meeting with the Charters Towers Regional Council, lunch with locals at Hughenden and smoko at Cloncurry.

meeting with the Cloncurry Shire Council, a smoko with people who had driven in from throughout the district, and a tour of the town and outlying water projects.

A final 120 km took me to Mount Isa and a meeting with experienced local politician and now Mayor Tony McGrady. He covered a number of topics, particularly the need for secure future water supply for the city and surrounds. The impact of drought and the need for guaranteed water for town, agricultural and mining uses were constant themes during this trip.

By lucky coincidence (and it was just a coincidence) the annual Mount Isa Rodeo got underway that night, so not only did I

take part in the opening ceremony but also was able to catch up with some mates I had worked with for a couple of weeks in the stock camp at Miranda cattle station, a property around 100 kilometres north-east of Normanton, before taking up my Senate seat.

The next day I met with Professor Sabina Knight, Director of the Mount Isa Centre for Rural and Remote Health (run by James Cook University), which performs a valuable service in remote and Indigenous health care education, and was shown over their facilities. Health is a vital issue in the bush and high-quality training essential.

Note: On October 16, Warren Truss announced the Coalition Government will be

providing \$15.9 million to help continue the Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative (GABSI) for a further three years. Since 1999, the Australian Government has invested nearly \$115 million to repair 650 uncontrolled artesian bores, saving 200 billion litres of water annually, and the latest funding is anticipated to save a further 13 billion litres each year.

In its report released in September, the Parliamentary Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia included the Hann Highway as one of the key roads for which it recommended the Australian Government should commit funds for upgrading as a matter of priority.

Renewables - the maths is dodgy

This article originally appeared as an opinion article in The Australian on 19 August

ADVOCATES of renewable energy would have you believe they have discovered the economic equivalent of the fountain of youth. According to them, we can adopt more expensive ways of doing things, yet that will lead to cheaper prices.

Renewable energy is more expensive than fossil fuels. If renewables were cheaper, they would not need the billions of dollars in subsidies they receive every year courtesy of taxpayers.

The most recent example of “magic pudding” economic modelling, released by the Climate Institute in August, purports to show subsidising renewable energy will in fact reduce energy prices. However, the report concedes, at least in its graphs, that abolishing the renewable energy target will reduce power prices.

The Climate Institute claims that, after a few years of falling prices, they will increase. This primarily occurs because the modelling assumes renewable energy will get cheaper through learning-by-doing. Thanks to this miraculously rapid learning, it is assumed that subsidies to renewables will drop from more than \$70 per megawatt hour in 2020 to just over \$10 by 2030. The modelling refers to “international studies” to support this assumption without referencing any. So much for peer review.

Windmills have been around for centuries and, despite massive investment from countries such as Denmark, they are still not economically viable without subsidies. But if the RET is about to solve the problem of affordable energy, why stop there?

For instance, Australia has long had a problem producing cheap and competitive cars but we have the solution. All we need is a domestic automobile target (DAT). The DAT will mandate that, say, 20% of our cars should be produced domestically. Domestic manufacturers will receive domestic automobile certificates (DACs) for every car they produce. Importers of cars will have to buy these DACs. We know this will work because it is a market-based solution. Just like the RET, it should magically reduce the price of cars for Australian consumers.

In reality, such a scheme would be nothing but a fancy form of tariff. Those who argued for tariffs argued that Australian industry needed protection when it was young, but one day it would grow up and would become cheaper and more competitive. Advocates of renewables use a version of this discredited infant-industry argument today.

The models used to support this just confirm the old joke: ask an economist what two plus two equals and he will respond:

“How much would you like it to equal?”

Some who can't bear to defend wealthy companies asking for taxpayer handouts say the RET is cheap. It is true that credible economic modelling shows the RET probably costs consumers about \$50 a year. Is that cheap?

Recently, the nation was gripped by the spectacle of a “regressive” fuel tax that would cost the average consumer \$20 a year. The same people who pillory the Treasurer for indexing fuel excise argue for a RET more than twice as costly. At least fuel excise will help build roads, whereas the RET doesn't make electricity more reliable or powerful, it just makes pensioners and the poor go without heating or air-conditioning to subsidise the lucky few with the resources to invest in the latest fad: renewables.

The RET is an extremely expensive form of emission reductions, between double and six times the cost of the carbon tax. It doesn't stop there. The big losers from the RET are those industries that use lots of energy, such as aluminium and fertiliser producers. Some economic modelling finds that the RET will lead to 5,000 fewer jobs.

There are few supporters left of high car or other tariffs. The biggest protection racket left is renewable energy.

The final argument used to stop protection from being removed is that it introduces sovereign risk and would be unfair to those who have invested in an industry based on government policy. Even some who want to remove renewable subsidies argue we should “grandfather” existing investments (that is, allow existing arrangements to continue as they are but not permit new arrangements under the same conditions).

There is merit in this but it cuts both ways. When the 20% RET was introduced five years ago, it effectively devalued billions of dollars' worth of coal and gas assets. Some estimates say the RET will transfer more than \$5 billion from fossil fuel to renewable assets in the next 15 years. Such an expropriation also represents sovereign risk. It is fine to talk about grandfathering renewables but we should also great-grandfather those who invested in coal, gas or aluminium before there was a prospect of a RET.

As an economically damaging protectionist policy, the RET should be removed. The adjustment should be done over time and the costs should be shared between fossil fuel, energy-intensive and renewable sectors alike.

Time for action on development of Northern Australia

A PATHFINDING report on development of northern Australia has been released. Compiled by a committee of parliamentarians representing both the Senate and the House of Representatives and all major parties, it makes 42 recommendations covering everything from mining and abattoirs to tourism and telehealth.

Its priority recommendations include funding key roadworks, building new dams, constructing rail lines, investigating special economic zones for the north and establishing a Department of Northern Australian Development.

The Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia has done a good job in looking at options for development. Now it's time to turn words into action. Let's start building the dams, roads and port facilities that are needed to drive development of northern Australia and drive further expansion of the Australian economy.

I particularly want action on dams, roads and ports, including: water development in the Fitzroy and Burdekin catchments and in the Gulf; the Nullinga Dam near Cairns; sealing of the Hann Highway north of Hughenden; more beef development roads; and expansion of the port of Karumba.

Relatively simple, straightforward action on northern projects can have far-reaching effects. For example, upgrading and sealing just 140 km of road along the Hann Highway (recommended in the

report) would provide a direct, fully-sealed route from Cairns to Melbourne via Bourke, cutting driving time by two days, diverting traffic from the busy Bruce Highway and allowing use of triple road trains. The Hann Highway can become an opportunity corridor.

Attracting private investment to develop the north will be crucial but we will also need to provide public infrastructure. No farm is an island: they need roads, water infrastructure and ports to connect to the opportunities in Asia.

The full report - *Pivot North: Inquiry into the Development of Northern Australia* released on September 4 by the Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia - can be accessed via the Australian Parliament website.

The Government is also developing a clear, well-defined and timely policy platform that is currently in the public consultation phase. The process includes production of what is referred to as a "green paper" raising issues for public comment, which will be followed by a "white paper" setting out the policy. (The Pivot North report will assist in developing this policy.)

To learn more about development of the Government's policy on developing northern Australia - and to have your say on this important issue - go to: northernaustralia.dpmc.gov.au.

GBR debate clouded by politics

IN late spring or early summer, corals on the Great Barrier Reef undergo a mass spawning phenomenon, with eggs so thick that in places they cloud the water. All too often, discussion about the future of the Great Barrier Reef is clouded too, but in that case by politics.

The Senate Environment and Communications References Committee in September released a report of its inquiry into "the adequacy of the Australian and Queensland Governments' efforts to stop the rapid decline of the Great Barrier Reef ..." With a loaded terms of reference and a Labor-Greens majority, we could always predict a negative view.

For its part, the Coalition wanted to produce a consensus report, a report all the committee members could agree upon, but that wasn't possible. We were so close that it makes me think that the fact we did not get there is more about politics than about facts.

This is not just about the environment. A lot of it is about the environment and the environment is very important. However, the environment is just one concept, and other things are important too: jobs are important; communities are important; families are important; and development is important. All of these things have to be balanced against each other.

A mature government and mature political parties realise that there are no easy decisions here, and tough choices have to be made. When the Labor Party was in government, they did realise that but of course, in opposition, they do not have the responsibilities they had a few months ago.

It is very unfortunate that now the Labor Party is joining with the Greens in this quest to make North Queensland the next version of north Tasmania. As a Queenslander, I do not want to do that. I do not want to see North Queensland become a northern version of Tasmania. I want to keep our state and our North Queensland very prosperous because there is a lot going on in that part of the world. If we listen to the Greens, we will have no new development, no new jobs and no new towns in that area.

The Queensland and Australian Governments deserve credit for the balanced way they are approaching development in the Great Barrier Reef region. It is a great thing that some coal mines are being approved up here, because what we need in Central Queensland and North Queensland is jobs.



Water security is a key issue throughout North Queensland and a recent report on developing northern Australia supports construction of new dams.



Coal is an efficient source of power and that's important for farmers because they need affordable electricity.

Food production needs affordable energy

This article originally appeared as an opinion article in Queensland Country Life on 28 September

THE last time I was at an anti-mining protest, there was a sign saying “We can’t eat coal”. I couldn’t argue against that: coal is fossilised plants 200 to 300 million years old. It is well past its use-by date.

But then, in another sense, we do eat coal, or at least the embodied energy that all food contains.

We could not produce the amount of food we now do without the remarkable increase in the use of energy in food production. Agriculture directly accounts for just 2% of Australia’s energy use but so much more of what happens on farm uses electricity indirectly.

Farm machinery takes energy to produce, fertilisers even more and many irrigation projects would not have occurred if it wasn’t for the value of dams as a source of hydropower.

Measuring the amount of “embodied energy” in, say, a tonne of wheat is not an easy calculation but some estimates have been made in the US and the UK. They would be broadly applicable here (although the calculations depend more on the type of cropping used rather than the location).

In the US, it takes around 100 kilograms of oil equivalent to produce a tonne of wheat. That is 4 gigajoules (GJ) in the metric measurements Australia commonly uses. What does 4 GJ mean?

This amount of energy is all of the energy inputs required to produce that tonne of wheat, and different sources of energy have different prices. It includes the natural gas used to make urea (around \$5 to \$10 per GJ), the diesel used in tractors and harvesters (\$30 per GJ) and the electricity used to pump water for irrigation (\$60 per GJ).

Based on estimates of the relative components of these sources of energy in the production of grains, the 4 GJ it takes to produce a tonne of wheat costs around \$80 a tonne. The price of wheat at the moment is somewhere around \$250 a tonne, depending on the quality. So energy prices account for around a third of the price of wheat.

All modern food production techniques need cheap, affordable supplies of energy to work.

That is why it was crucial for agriculture that we got rid of the carbon tax.

There has been some controversy about the cost of mandatory levies that fund research and development and joint marketing among other things. But the carbon tax was the ultimate mandatory levy and it delivered nothing to agriculture in return. The impact of the carbon tax was around \$3-4 per tonne for the grains industry (compared with a levy of \$2.50 a tonne) and around \$5 to \$10 a head for the beef industry (compared to a levy of \$5 per head).

All this to pander to a misguided green ideology that we could change the temperature of the globe from Australia. None of it helped us become better at producing our food.

Now that the carbon tax is gone, however, the other mandatory electricity levy that remains is the mandatory renewable energy target. That target requires that a certain amount of electricity must be sourced from renewable sources each year.

The renewable energy target does put up electricity prices. It subsidises more expensive ways of energy (wind and solar) at the expense of cheaper ways (coal and gas). Making energy more expensive makes farming more expensive in Australia.

The impact of the renewable energy target increases electricity prices by around half the amount of the carbon tax – although this will likely increase as the target increases in the next few years.

We have a choice in this country: we can have cheap energy or we can produce dear food. Australia has been built on its ability to produce cheap, affordable food and I want it to remain that way.

To do that, we need to turn our backs on the energy myths peddled by the Greens and other snake-oil salesmen. It is time we focussed on what we are good at as a nation, and try to keep getting better at every year.

FTAs make sense

Earlier this year, FTAs were signed with the Republic of Korea and Japan (which will enter into force when domestic processes have been completed), and negotiations are continuing with other important trading partners, including China.

The two new agreements are great outcomes for Queensland's beef industry.

The agreement with Korea will mean that Australian beef will not keep losing ground to US beef. The US signed an agreement with Korea in 2012 and has already got a 5.4% advantage on Australian beef. That gap would have gotten wider without this agreement.

Under the agreement with Japan, beef tariffs will fall – from 38.5% today to 19.5% for frozen beef and 23.5% for chilled beef – over 15 years. In the first half of the agreement alone, tariffs will be cut to 30% for frozen beef and 32.5% for chilled beef.

Australia is the only major agricultural exporter to now have a trade agreement with Japan. More markets for our beef will mean more money for producers. More money for producers means more money circulating through towns and more jobs. The re-opening of the live export trade has had a big impact on prices and this agreement will add to that effect.

FTA negotiations are not always easy or swift – for example, negotiations with China have been going on for 10 years – but it is vitally important that we continue these discussions and eventually conclude further FTAs with major trading partners like China.

Higher education changes give greater fairness

THE Coalition Government's planned higher education changes deliver greater fairness to all students and taxpayers, and provide great opportunities for rural and

regional students in particular.

For the first time, all higher-education students will be able to access government loans. It shouldn't matter whether you get to wear a gown at the end of your qualifications. Everyone should benefit from government support. The extra support will be funded by allowing universities to set their own prices. At the moment, the average student pays around 40% of the cost and taxpayers pick up the rest. Under the changes, students will pay around half and taxpayers the other half. On average, someone with a university degree will earn about \$1 million more in their working life than someone without a degree, so that seems like a fair deal.

The Government will also require universities and other higher education providers to direct \$1 in every \$5 of additional revenue raised to Commonwealth scholarships for disadvantaged students, which will especially help students from regional Australia.

Mandatory code for wheat exports

THE Australian Government has released the mandatory port access code of conduct for bulk wheat exports, which will assist farmers and exporters to access the infrastructure that delivers Australia's wheat to the rest of the world.

Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce and Small Business Minister Bruce Billson have said the code will replace the outdated existing arrangements, and give exporters of bulk wheat fair and transparent access to port terminal services.

"We're doing everything we can to support our \$6.8 billion wheat export industry to continue to be a reliable supplier of high-quality products," Barnaby Joyce said. "After consulting widely with industry, we made some changes to the code to address potential concerns. The code now ensures the level

of regulation on port terminal operators is fit-for-purpose and won't impose unnecessary regulatory burden on our wheat export industry."

The code of conduct is monitored and enforced by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, and will work with existing competition law to ensure third party access to critical port infrastructure. As a regulation under the Competition and Consumer Act 2010, a breach of the code is a breach of that Act, which has serious consequences.

The code commenced on September 30. The Government has provided for a three-year review of the effectiveness and ongoing relevance of the requirements of the code, and a further review if the code is still in place three years later.

Kingaroy needs new hospital

KINGAROY needs a new hospital. That's my firm conclusion after touring the existing local hospital with the local Member for Nanango, Deb Frecklington, and the Assistant Minister for Health, Fiona Nash.

A tradesman is only as good as his tools. The doctors and nurses at the Kingaroy Hospital do a fantastic job but they are limited by the tools they have to work with.

The need for a new hospital in Kingaroy is clear. Rabbits would get lost in some of the hallways. As a Senator for Queensland, I will do everything I can to bring its needs to the top of the list. That's why I asked Fiona to come up from Canberra to have a look.

She said that Kingaroy has one of the busiest maternity wards in regional Queensland and it does its best with a hospital built in World War II. "It does a great job but could do a lot better with better facilities. While State Governments fund hospitals, I will raise the needs of Kingaroy with the Queensland Health Minister, Lawrence Springborg."

Important job for young Edward

MY wife Andrea and I were thrilled to welcome our fourth child into the world on August 21: Edward Immanuel Canavan, an already-adored brother for William, Jack and Henry.

Mum and baby are doing wonderfully.

Edward has already learned how to sleep quite well, which is much faster progress than his older brothers. His next job will be to teach them how to stop fighting amongst each other and get along.



“Black Jack”: in his own words

A NEW edition of the autobiography of John “Black Jack” McEwen – one of only three Country / Nationals party MPs to become Prime Minister – has been launched.

John McEwen: His Story was launched in Parliament House on October 21 by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure & Regional Development Warren Truss and veteran political journalist Laurie Oakes

This book is an overdue rectification of the previous difficulty in getting John McEwen’s autobiography. He retired from politics in 1970 and his autobiography was first published in 1980 but only 200 copies were printed. A former Prime Minister’s memoirs should be more prevalent than hen’s teeth.

I worked with my wife, Andrea, and the unofficial Nationals historian, Paul Davey, over the past year on this book. The Page Research Centre paid for the printing.

We are republishing McEwen’s autobiography because his legacy has probably been more abused than any other Australian politician. The modern view of McEwen is as a fervent protectionist, not a complex, astute, influential statesman. Much has been forgotten about McEwen: for example, he spoke against protectionism in his first speech and signed an historic trade agreement with Japan just a decade after the Second World War.

McEwen vigorously supported our “wealth-producing industries” of agriculture, mining and manufacturing. At a time when our terms of trade is falling, this has increasing relevance. We need to rediscover that the basis of so much of our wealth comes from the use of our abundant natural resources.

His approach put a public and assertive face to the advocacy of country interests, while remaining forever committed to a strong Coalition.

Laurie Oakes describes John McEwen as one of the few people he’s met who deserves the description of “great”.



Laurie Oakes in conversation with Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce and Deputy PM Warren Truss at the book launch.

“It’s one of the pluses of having been around as long as I have that I knew John McEwen,” Laurie told those gathered in the Nationals party room for the book launch. “I don’t claim I knew him well. But as a young political journalist on the Sydney Mirror I travelled with him in the 1966 election campaign through a string of rural and regional seats in NSW and Queensland. And during his last couple of years in politics, by which time I’d become Canberra bureau chief for the largest circulation paper in the country, the Melbourne Sun News-Pictorial, I used to drop into his office occasionally for a chat.

“I learned a lot about politics from those chats. And I learned a fair bit about John McEwen. I admired him. He is one of the few people I’ve met in 50 years of journalism who I think deserves the description ‘great’.”

Laurie recalled he had a cup of tea with McEwen on his last day in Parliament before his retirement in October, 1970.

“I’ve got strong memories of that cup of tea in the Deputy Prime Minister’s office in Old Parliament House. I came away with a

quote in my notebook that summed up the bloke Warren describes in the foreword to this book as ‘perhaps the greatest of the Nationals’ leaders’. I don’t think, by the way, that there’s any ‘perhaps’ about it.

“The quote I’m talking about was this: ‘I’ll fight for a thing for five years, seven years, till I damn well get it.’ I’d like to see more of that commitment, that passion, in politics today. Black Jack was a fighter. And he certainly was, as Warren says, resolute.”

As Laurie noted, Black Jack McEwen spent 36 years in Federal Parliament, 25 years in the Cabinet and 12 years as leader of the Country Party and Deputy PM.

“We’ve had a reminder today (with the passing of Gough Whitlam) of how the Labor Party treats its heroes. Honours them. Fetes them. Builds them up. Takes advantage of them. I’m glad that, with the publication of this book, the National Party is doing the same.”

John McEwen: His Story can be purchased for \$25 plus postage. For details, email johnmcewen@page.org.au. It is also available for Kindle readers for \$12 from www.amazon.com.au.

Contact

For more information about any of the articles or issues raised in this edition of *Central Bulletin*, please contact me at the addresses or numbers below. For the latest news and views - including media releases and opinion articles - check out my website and Facebook page and follow me on Twitter.

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CQU has to be part of Northern Australian Plan

I HAVE called on the Government's Northern Australian Taskforce to include Central Queensland University in future agricultural research initiatives.

CQUiversity is one of the best agricultural universities in the country and must be included in any future northern agricultural Co-operative Research Centre (CRC). In the green paper on the Government's Northern Australia Plan released earlier this year, James Cook University (JCU) in Townsville and Charles Darwin University (CDU) in the Northern Territory were included but CQU was omitted.

The Fitzroy catchment has enormous food growing potential with massive water resources and great soils. It is already an agricultural powerhouse but can go to the next level with more investment in dams and irrigation.

Along with State Member for Keppel, Bruce Young, I met representatives from the Prime Minister's Taskforce when they visited the CQUiversity Rockhampton campus in mid-September and we both stressed the need not to forget Central Queensland in the northern Australia Plan.

Adding further weight to the argument in favour of CQU's inclusion, the Joint Parliamentary Committee has recently recommended that the Australian Government support the creation of a Co-operative Research Centre for Northern Agriculture – and that all three universities substantially based in Northern Australia (JCU, CDU and CQU) should be involved in the CRC.

James Cook University and Charles Darwin University are already full partners

Senators visit Central Queensland

I WAS joined by four fellow Coalition Senators in late July for a tour of the Rockhampton-Yeppoon region hosted by Member for Capricornia Michelle Landry.

Michelle is a tireless advocate for the region and she took this opportunity to ensure our fellow Coalition MPs gained a solid understanding of issues she has been pushing in Canberra.

The four visiting Senators were Nigel

Scullion, Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Fiona Nash, Assistant Minister for Health, Bridget McKenzie from Victoria and John Williams from New South Wales.

During three days here, the team's itinerary included numerous meetings with health, indigenous, primary industry and business groups, and community-based functions.



Top: Senators Bridgette McKenzie (second from left), Fiona Nash (third from left) and John Williams (far right) have been hosted on a visit to Central Queensland by Michelle Landry, Member for Capricornia.

in the AgNorth CRC process. CQUiversity should be too.

Note: It was good to see the CQU Vice-Chancellor Professor Scott Bowman was appointed in mid-October to the Northern Australia Advisory Group, which will provide expert advice on developing Northern Australia to members of a Strategic Partnership made up of the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Premiers of Queensland and Western Australia, and the Chief Minister of the

Northern Territory. This is a significant appointment and appropriate recognition of the important role CQU could play in supporting development of the north.

Live cattle exports planned for Port Alma

MOVES are underway to export live cattle from Port Alma, which would be good news for producers in Central Queensland.

A Live Export Steering Committee is examining the practicalities of sending cattle from Port Alma, at the mouth of the Fitzroy River, and so far the prospects look promising.

Beef producers are doing it tough because prices are low at the farm gate. If we want producers to restock, they have to have confidence that there will be a market with good prices at the other end. Having multiple supply outlets will build confidence and make for a stronger beef industry.

A new port in Central Queensland will help producers cut transport costs by having a port closer by will be better for stock as well. Around 80 cattle producers in the Central Queensland already send cattle to Townsville for live export.



Along with State Member for Keppel Bruce Young (right) and Central Queensland University (CQU) Vice-Chancellor Scott Bowman (centre), I have been promoting the valuable role CQU can make in research projects related to development of northern Australia.

Front cover photo: Taking a break at Emerald Airport during an aerial inspection of CQ dam sites with Member for Capricornia Michelle Landry and Member for Flynn Ken O'Dowd. (See article on page 6.)