



PRIME MINISTER

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ELECTORATE TALK

For most of us who live in the great cities, the problems of outback life are given little or only very cursory thought. We are preoccupied with our own problems, our own backyard.

For Governments too - particularly a Canberra-based national Government - the problems of outback living can sometimes be very easily misunderstood. This can then often lead to Government policy solutions that are much less than satisfactory. It is then that politicians and public servants hear the cry - 'you just don't understand our real problems; you spend all your time in Canberra; how can you understand?' Perhaps there is more validity to this cry than politicians care to admit.

It was for that basic reason that I and Government colleagues made a visit to central, western and northern Queensland during the week. The visit certainly brought home a vivid picture of the concerns and the needs of thousands of men, women and children who have made that part of Australia their home.

Most Australians enjoy and appreciate such services as handy schools, television and daily postal services. In fact, we take them very much for granted. For families living in isolated areas like central western Queensland, these kind of services simply do not exist. They do not play a part in their lives. Mail can often take up to two or three weeks to get to and from a capital city. Television reception - either black and white or colour - is a luxury that is frequently only enjoyed on a visit to Brisbane or another large city, while schooling is frequently left to parental care, or is conducted over a radio phone. The great distances and physical conditions also present their own special problems such as high transport maintenance costs and fuel costs.

Perhaps not surprisingly, this kind of life breeds an independence, a sense of purpose and a bluntness in speech. This is not an unruly bluntness. It is not unreasonable. It is not unfair. It is simply a no-nonsense way of meeting and talking about problems head on. It implies - as I found out particularly when talking to a deputation of trade unionists from the township of Mary Kathleen - also a willingness to listen to another view. It implies a willingness to listen to argument without resort to unlawful or unreasonable behaviour.

/Politicians

Politicians from all political parties - and community leaders from all walks of life - could do much worse than seek to emulate the kind of spirit that is very much in evidence in outback Queensland.

Despite the clearly obvious difficulties in day to day living, the men and women I and my colleagues spoke with were uncomplaining. They accepted that some of their problems could be overcome with work, imagination and a willingness to help each other out. Of course, these people know that decisions of Government have a very real and direct effect on their way of life.

I and my Government are acutely aware of the need to get a first-hand knowledge of the problems, so that we can at least be in a position to make policy decisions that can have practical effect.

While the people we met were appreciative of the measures the Government is taking to aid the rural community during its current difficulties, they were not willing to 'leave it all to the Government'.

These families value their independence. They value what they have built. They are determined that their effort - and the efforts of their forebears on the land - will not be thrown away.

Despite the very serious problems in the rural community, particularly among beef producers, the Queenslanders we met this week are facing the future with spirit and determination. They have confidence in their own ability to see through this difficult time. They have confidence in their state, and certainly have a great confidence in their country. It is part of their make-up and part of their character.

I believe it is a part that all Australians should seek to copy.

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