



ALICE SPRINGS TO DARWIN RAILWAY BILL

13 February 1997

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders): I support the Bill because of the immediate economic benefits—potentially the \$1 billion that it will mean for South Australia—and because it will bring into effect something that should have been done decades ago. A direct link to Asia through Darwin would take much of South Australia's freight that now goes through the Eastern State seaports. The consequent lower costs would be of direct benefit to South Australia's businesses. This State could be the food bowl for Asia. My own electorate of Flinders would be the source of much of this food in grain and fish products. A more direct link with the market will ensure fresher produce to the consumer and more markets and better prices for our producers.

South Australia's white goods and car manufacturing industries would also have an advantage in accessing Australian markets through Darwin via the rail link. Australia has often been held to ransom in the business world because of two factors: one is the tyranny of distance; and the other is that, as an island nation, Australia relies on sea and air transport to get anything to the overseas markets. Rail has the potential to be faster and safer than road, with the human factor in long distance haulage affecting service. We have recently had a most unfortunate incident in this State and the consequences that this can cause with an extremely bad trucking accident.

We must capitalise on our advantages. In marketing we must fit in with what the client is looking for, rather than expecting the customer to fit in with what is being done. With Alice Springs connected to Darwin by rail we could target overseas tourism markets with a 'See Australia by rail campaign', thus bringing revenue into this State. Our proximity to the Asian region makes this a particularly exciting possibility. A tourism promotion to cross the Australian continent from north to south by rail would tie in easily with the international airport at Darwin. Specific purpose tourism trains could be scheduled to stop at locations of significant interest to the tourist.

Package tours could use rail as a base with passengers stopping off *en route* at Alice Springs to take in Uluru. South Australia would have a number of possibilities. Some that come to mind are: Coober Pedy for opal mining; Tarcoola or Port Augusta to take in Eyre Peninsula with its whales at the head of the Bight, tuna farms, aquaculture, wineries, alternative farming such as quandongs and emus and the biggest known black jade mine in the world; Pimba for a visit to Woomera; Roxby Downs; and possibly the arid botanic gardens at Port Augusta. Adelaide would provide city attractions to complete a crossing of the Australian continent that would be exciting, memorable and, above all, attractive to tourists because it is different.

It is pleasing to see an increasing concern and interest in environmental issues, and I believe this will bring a renewed urgency to use rail as a method of transportation. Periodically, the argument recurs that we must make the most economical and efficient use of our fossil fuel resources. Motor vehicles and the construction of roads are massive consumers of these resources and also of scarce funds that can be more constructively deployed elsewhere in the State. The Alice Springs to Darwin rail link is a visionary enterprise. The people of South Australia have often shown vision and enterprise above the average, and it is, therefore, not surprising that this State has acted to make the provision of the north-south rail link across the nation a reality. It has been said that if the Snowy Mountain Scheme were proposed today it would not get off the ground: that is a sad reflection on a general lack of will to build for the future.

The South Australian Liberal Government has put us in a position to build for the future. It has acted with prudence and acumen to bring the State out of the worst financial crisis facing it since the economic depression of the 1930s. We have endured the pain of cuts in all areas and departments. I commend the relevant Ministers and my colleagues for the pragmatic and compassionate handling of the State's finances, which will see this State Government balance the budget.

The Liberal Government has brought us to a place where we can now look forward with confidence and hope. It is said that there is a time for everything; this is the time for the completion of the Darwin to Alice Springs railway. I support the Bill.