

NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

DARWIN HARBOUR LAUNCH

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Mrs HERSEY: I retract where I said, 'Contrary to what the Member for Daly stated earlier in the day, that the residents were not happy, I got quite a different story'.

Mr Young: Thank you.

Madam SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Katherine.

Mrs HERSEY: I heard the Member for Daly comment, but we will not go there.

What I can tell you is that it was lovely to be in that community. I have not been out that way before. It truly is a beautiful part of the world.

It was lovely to meet Warren Wodidj, the traditional owner, and his sister Mary, along with other members and children who were all so excited to be back in their own homes. As of last Friday morning, all evacuees accommodated at the Batchelor Outdoor Education Centre were brought home, with staff reporting whooping cheers as they touched down on home soil. Around the barbecue, we were talking to some of the members and kids. They were so excited to be home. They could have a fire out the front of their own place, and had all the new stuff they received for a bit of a refurb of their homes. It was great to have a conversation with them and listen to their stories. During our community barbecue, I saw firsthand how happy people were to be back on country.

I visited the fully stocked self-efficacy community store run by local Indigenous cultural recovery adviser, Warren Wodidj. I thank him for the great work he has done in representing his community and with our government.

During my visit I also met nurse Tilly Todhunter who is doing an exceptional job in the new clinic space. The health clinic had been flooded considerably—about waist high. As you would expect when floodwater comes through, everything was tipped upside down, all their records and everything; it was a mess.

Honestly, it is terrible when you have been through a flood. The stench of that flood mud stays with you forever.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Katherine, your time has expired.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, on 16 April it was my delight to attend an event at the AANT Centre which, for once, was not an art event but an environment event. It was the Darwin Harbour report launch, an inaugural event. I have a copy of the presentation, which is worth tabling. I seek leave to table it.

Leave granted.

Dr RAHMAN: The report highlights the incredible nature that is on our doorstep, and its findings were enlightening. It suggested, amongst other things, that our harbour is comparable in fish diversity with the renowned Ningaloo Reef.

Most Territorians and I think all parliamentarians in this place value the biodiversity of Darwin Harbour and the unparalleled Territory lifestyle that our harbour is supporting. It was encouraging to be at that event to see representatives of the government, crossbench and opposition—albeit the newest member of the opposition—in attendance, plus many hundreds of others.

Darwin Harbour is undoubtedly a precious community asset. I have memories as a child of throwing a line with my Uncle Naz in the harbour back when it was a rickety set of structures. None of us want for its wanton destruction; we all have to recognise that we have a shared interest in protecting it. It teems with abundant wildlife, has phenomenal biodiversity and is an important gathering place for the community.

I reinforce that I think genuinely there is a shared commitment in this House to preserving and protecting that asset, notwithstanding our different perspectives and prescriptions for improving our economic prospects in the NT. That will be an ongoing debate, so it is important that we talk about the environment and economic development, even when it involves things as contentious as the gas industry and extractive industries, all in the same space respectfully.

Speaking of respect, I thank Dr Kirsty Howey, Executive Director of Environment Centre NT, who invited me to the event. She was an extremely gracious host. It was a real surprise that the first thing I found out when I met her was I knew her brother really well at university. I cannot think of a more gentle giant statesman than

Hugh Howey, who I went to university with and is now a schoolteacher and was always a better wicketkeeper than me, even all those years ago. Dr Howey and I had robust but respectful discussions about the future of the Northern Territory, development, the value of the harbour and how we might sustainably pursue development in the Northern Territory.

The mainstays of the program were four presenters who delivered phenomenal lectures. Dr Ben Fitzpatrick, environmental scientist and Director of Oceanwise, gave a great presentation which helped me learn much more about Darwin Harbour. I am not an ecologist or biodiversity specialist; frankly, I do not know a lot about fish, birds and coastlines. It was enlightening to learn a tonne of new information that was up to date in that regard. Darwin has 3,200 square kilometres of estuary. It is one of the world's least disturbed and most biodiverse coastlines and is shaped by powerful macro tides and monsoonal freshwater flows. There is a complex mosaic of habitats and all the pictures associated with the presentation were enlightening to see, such as all the mangrove species. We have 36 of 50 of the mangrove species globally, and nearly one-third of the area is covered by highly productive tidal flats.

Going through the flora and fauna side of it—I am not sure whether sponge species are flora or fauna—there were discussions of the rich filter-feeding communities, including 800 sponge species. There was talk of 2,500 species of crustaceans, molluscs and marine worms; 500-plus species of fish, including the sawfish which is endangered; marine reptiles; crocs; turtles; sea snakes; dugongs; and coastal dolphins.

It was a fascinating lecture and unexpected in some ways. I went with an open mind. I wanted to see what I might learn and what the event might be like, given it was the first time something of this type has been launched. I was not disappointed in the slightest.

I do not have a copy of the report on me, otherwise I would have sought to table that as well. I tabled the presentation that was given on the day, and it may be of value to other members in the House to look through it.

Dr Amanda Lilleyman, who is a migratory shorebird expert and co-convenor of Birdlife Top End, also spoke. It was interesting to learn about all the birds in the Northern Territory and all the places they are. Some of the obvious things you know about and some of the less obvious ones you do not, so it was enlightening.

There was Thor Jensen, who is a longstanding community campaigner at the Australian Marine Conservation Society. Quite frankly, sawfish always scared me. I did not know much about them other than they look terrifying. When you learn more about all these things, it is fascinating.

Perhaps no-one was more fascinating and interesting to me, and more of a surprise package, than Donna Jackson, a Larrakia woman with expertise in ethnobiology, guided bush tucker walks, local history and environment and whatnot. She had some interesting thoughts. She is not necessarily the kind of person I would have come across every day to have a lot of these conversations. Towards the end of her lecture, she started talking about, of all things, Hegelian dialectic, which are not two words I thought I would hear outside of a university context anytime soon. It was a moment reminiscent for me of high-end, interesting common room talks in prestigious universities that I have been blessed to occasion on from time to time.

It was a great event. I am pleased to have been there and seen other members of the Assembly there as well, albeit maybe not as many as we see at the footy. Once again, I implore all of you to sometimes diversify your portfolio of event attendance. Frankly, I could probably afford to go to the footy a bit more often. In saying that, it would be lovely …

Mr Kerle: There is a Raiders home game on Saturday.

Dr RAHMAN: That is true. I take the interjection. I will be representing the minister at the orchestra and the Chorale concert, Member for Blain; otherwise, I would be at the footy.

I am committed to lifelong learning. Given the importance of natural assets in the Northern Territory, I was pleased to learn more about our rivers, fish and birds. Let me be blunt about this event, momentarily: it was not an activist rally or what a lot of people feared or thought or might have presupposed if you did not go there. It was not a series of people beating up on you, trying to shove their ideology down your throat. It was nothing like that at all; it was a fascinating, rational, instructive set of scientific information, basically a set of great lectures.

In my opinion we need way more of exactly that on tough topics, and respectful debates to accompany them. If we do not have those conversations, all we do is fling mud with imperfect information. I sincerely believe

that the government I am a part of wants to fix problems. It has a plan for how to do it. I want to be a part of that plan working out. If it does not work out, other people will have a go again.

In the meantime, we have to at least, not just inside the Chamber but also outside, have the same tone of discussion about stuff. We cannot be mean to each other in here and then nice outside or vice versa. There has to be a common standard on information sharing, otherwise we will never move forward; this will just be performative.

My ideological disposition may not have been in alignment with some of the people in the room that day. Having said that, I saw a wide diversity of people there—I say to members of the government—including past CLP presidents who happened to be around who also care about the environment. I know a lot of people were invited …

Mrs Zio: I was invited; I just could not go.

Dr RAHMAN: I am sure plenty of people could not be there for good reasons. I take that point as well, Member for Fannie Bay; it is a fair point to make. We are all busy.

Smart, calm, sensible discussions were had that day about nature-based tourism, fisheries, aquaculture, recreational use of the harbour, coastal protection, nursery habitats, water quality and much more. It is important that we learn how to disagree agreeably, to maintain respect and rapport whilst holding opposing views, and focus on connection rather than always winning.

I thank Dr Howey for the invitation and everyone involved in hosting what I thought was an exceptional event. I hope to see more colleagues at similar events, with a view to us all working together with common purpose and information in making decisions to balance our environmental and economic responsibilities and priorities for the Northern Territory.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, I find myself agreeing with the Member for Fong Lim again. It was a wonderful and enlightening evening. I agree that we can do things much better when we actually listen to and learn from each other.

I rise to speak about someone who people in this Chamber may not be familiar with, Vaiben Louis Solomon, despite the fact that one of the Northern Territory's two federal electorates is named after him. I was reminded of his remarkable and complicated story this week when I briefly attended an event at Brown's Mart honouring his legacy, hosted by Luke Gosling, the current Member for Solomon, and attended by representatives of the federal parliament, of the local and national Jewish community and from across the Darwin community.

When I moved to my home in Millner, nearly 30 years ago, I noticed the street next door was called Solomon Street. It stood out to me because it is clearly a Jewish name in a suburb where almost all the street names are Anglo–Christian, although, importantly, there are streets named after prominent Chinese Territorians, including Chin, Leung, Cheong and Tong Luck. The Place Names Register simply describes Solomon as a councillor of the early district council of Palmerston in 1874, but he was much more than that.

Dubbed 'Mr Everything', because there were few pursuits he would not try, he came to the Territory from Adelaide as a gold prospector, ran his brother's business then opened his own, invested in mining and pearling, owned and edited the *Northern Territory Times* and *Gazette* and built Solomon's Emporium—the historic building we now know as Brown's Mart—which he ran as a general store for the then city of Palmerston. Legend has it that he did some of the carpentry himself. He was also a shipping and insurance agent; a builder; an auctioneer; an author of books about sport, the Western Australian Goldfields and the Northern Territory; and, briefly, the Honorary Vice-Consul for the Netherlands.

As an Independent MLA trying to keep across an endless number of issues and portfolios, I have to admit that I found what he was doing strangely reassuring. It would be useful to have some of his energy.

When the Northern Territory gained representation in the South Australian Parliament, Solomon became the Territory's representative in 1890. Apparently, he campaigned by pushing himself from Darwin to Katherine on a railway trolley—and we all complain about doorknocking in the Build-Up. While urging economic development of the Territory, particularly the completion of the Transcontinental Railway between Adelaide and Palmerston in the 1890s—it took us a while to get there—he also campaigned for better regulation of the mining industry. I am on board with him on that.