



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

CONDOLENCES

Thomson, Hon. David Scott, MC

SPEECH

Tuesday, 12 November 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Katter, Bob, MP

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Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (17:49): About half of what was the Leichhardt electorate then is now the Kennedy electorate. Obviously I knew David very well. He was a good friend of my father and I had a lot of interface with him.

The decision by the Menzies-McEwen government to base the Army in North Queensland has had a very salutary effect upon North Queensland. We had a very great man in David Thomson, staying on in North Queensland, much to the benefit of North Queensland. Brigadier General Grey stayed on in North Queensland and became a very great asset to North Queensland, and Brigadier George Mansford, one of our most outspoken North Queenslanders, God bless him, stayed on in North Queensland. So it was an excellent decision by the Menzies-McEwen government.

As the minister for Indigenous affairs in 1984, I had a very rocky road. It was a very conservative government, with attitudes that were extremely conservative, and I had to hoe a very radical path, whether I liked it or whether I did not. My back was protected very much by David Thomson. It took a lot of courage to protect my back in those days. I think that the First Australians owe David a very real debt of gratitude. Wonderful breakthroughs occurred in those years. Without a lot of people like him protecting my back, I do not know whether they could have been achieved—self-management and the issue of title deeds, of course, being the two leading ones.

Also, the Torres Strait was being handed over, effectively, to New Guinea. There was a tremendous fight by the Torres Strait Islanders. They did not want to, but the Australian government and the American government thought it would be good to please people by handing them over. He took a very strong position behind the Torres Strait Islanders and having the Torres Strait Islands remain as part of Australia. His buying into that battle, against a lot of hostility down here in this place, led to the Torres Strait still being part of Australia. I think we are looking forward to an era in which some autonomy should be delivered there. In any event, we can deliver the autonomy because we have the power. Also, there was a tradition of terrible fighting between the Torres Strait Islanders and mainland New Guinea. It was a traditional battleground. It would have been terrible for them to be placed under people that they had fought for centuries.

Finally, the Institute of Marine Science is one of the very great institutes in the world. It is one of the leading six institutes of marine science in the world. I do not think it would be there without Professor Joe Baker, but also David played a very, very key role in bringing that result around, which has been of great benefit not only to Australia but to the entire planet Earth. I join with the other people in praising David and remembering, with great affection, David Thomson.