



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

Federation Chamber

GRIEVANCE DEBATE

**Bonner Electorate: Rochedale
Community Garden**

SPEECH

Monday, 17 September 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

<p>Date Monday, 17 September 2012 Page 195 Questioner Speaker Vasta, Ross, MP</p>	<p>Source House Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
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Mr VASTA (Bonner) (21:20): It is with pleasure that I rise tonight to acknowledge a wonderful community initiative within my electorate of Bonner called the Rochedale Community Garden. I know that a lot of us in this chamber would be very familiar with this concept of community gardens, but you might not know the history behind their inception. Community gardens have been a traditional land use in Europe and the UK since the early 19th century. As early as 1819 in the UK and in the 1830s in Western Europe, allotments were there to assist the urban working class. These provided a breathing space in the crowded industrial cities, and their produce supplemented the food supply of families. The concept was adopted by American President Hoover following the stock market crash of 1929 in America, when up to 30 per cent of the workforce was unemployed. Hoover introduced the relief garden program, which turned vacant land into viable community gardens that soon became a vehicle for self-respect and also had the practical benefits of providing sustenance to families and communities often in dire straits.

Fast forward nearly a century to the suburb of Rochedale on the southern outskirts of my electorate of Bonner. Rochedale was for many years an important salad bowl district supplying the Rocklea Markets with fresh fruit and vegetables. During the Second World War years, Rochedale farmers supplied their produce to the large Army encampment at Coopers Plains. Until the 1990s small farmers on 10-acre blocks could make a reasonable living, but with the growth in Brisbane's population and the rise in land values and farming costs these smallholdings have sometimes become untenable. Bigger farms in regional areas can produce large amounts of food on an economy-of-scale basis. The Rochedale Urban Village residential development, an initiative of the Brisbane City Council, has resulted in many such farms being sold, and the suburb is now undergoing rapid change from small farms to small allotments. As a result, many of the old farmers are moving on and the new homeowners are moving in. The demographic is changing.

Enter the Rochedale Community Garden, an idea that began as a seed in the minds of two local residents, Steve Griffin and Carolyn Collins—who I will talk about in more detail later—and has quickly grown into a thriving community project. It was my very great honour to officially open this wonderful not-for-profit community garden on 9 September 2012. It was a truly wonderful event where I was able to speak about the importance of community gardens. I was fortunate enough to plant a finger lime tree and unveil a plaque to commemorate the official opening. It was great to see such large-scale community support, with the opening attended by over 80 local community members.

But what really surprised me the most was the sheer scale of work that had been achieved in the garden in only 10 weeks. It was truly tremendous progress in only a few short months. As well as infrastructure work such as site levelling, shed assembly and water tank installation, significant progress has been made on garden bed construction. It is also amazing to see that some of the communal and rental garden beds are already productive, and the herb spiral construction was particularly impressive. I am told that even more communal beds and compost bays and a greenhouse are under construction. The chicken hutch, with its four young chickens, was a key attraction for the children that attended. In fact, it was hard to see it with so many of them crowded around it. The garden is planted with an array of organically grown fruits, herbs and vegetables and will offer options for informative workshops and community events.

With the motto of 'Growing together', the Rochedale members are keen to be inclusive and are offering activities to welcome as many people as possible. On weekdays, gardeners can come and go at their leisure, and do a spot of planting, harvesting or watering, or just have a chat. Each Sunday, it is on for young and old, often accompanied by a dog or two, as the group meets for the gardening bee. I am told that there is always work to be done and the sounds of shovelling are only drowned out by the sounds of laughter, and that the willing workers are more than happy to share their experiences and ideas with those who seek guidance.

As the suburb transforms, it is crucial to the newcomers to Rochedale that they will be able to engage with others who have lived in the district for many years or decades. People from the wider community are also welcomed.

What better way is there to bring like-minded people together? There is no doubt that community gardens are here to stay, and they are springing up all over Australia. They can offer healthy, interesting and stimulating activities to people from all walks of life, of all ages, from all cultures—people with abilities and also with disabilities.

I personally greatly value these community initiatives in our ever-changing world, and recognise the immense contribution of such projects. However, these types of projects would not be possible without the amazing people behind them. Above all, I wish to acknowledge the tireless and inspirational work of two people without whom this wonderful community initiative would not have been made possible: Steve Griffin, the owner of the land in Rochedale that the community garden is actually built upon, and Carolyn Collins, proprietor of Turner's nursery in Miles Platting Road, Rochedale. Steve has generously provided much of the infrastructure and Carolyn has donated garden products and fruit trees, and together they provided the materials for the initial garden construction. These two individuals have been extraordinarily generous with their resources, invaluable expertise and priceless personal time. As the president and vice president of the garden respectively, they are amazing community ambassadors, and I salute them for their hard work and meaningful contribution to our society.

I also note that a number of local sponsors have supported this very worthy community initiative, and I thank them today on behalf of the rest of the community. Because the Rochedale Community Garden initiative keeps their mutual membership low—it is a bargain at \$40 for an annual family membership—they do not have the resources for several more of the big-ticket items that they need, such as a composting toilet, covered-in work area, solar power, crucial water pump, and a container that could be converted into a meeting room. I encourage the local community and businesses to get behind this worthy project and discuss further sponsorship options.

I will most certainly be working with my colleagues Ian Walker, the state member for Mansfield, and Councillor Adrian Schrunner, councillor for Chandler, to see what types of governmental sponsorship opportunities may be available. I know that my colleagues and I will do whatever it takes to make sure that we support the Rochedale Community Garden. Adrian and I have no doubt that the Rochedale Community Garden will grow to become a most valuable community asset—a garden that will provide an environment where people of all ages and cultures can share their passion for gardening and sustainability.