



Speech by

**DESLEY BOYLE**

**MEMBER FOR CAIRNS**

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Hansard 17 November 1998

#### **CAIRNS MUSEUM**

**Ms BOYLE** (Cairns—ALP) (12.12 p.m.): I would like to inform the House of some good news for Cairns. The board of the Queensland Museum has called for applications for a museum development officer in Cairns. According to the advertisement in the Far North Cultural Industry Association newsletter, the position "will provide a range of professional advisory and training services to museums and galleries in the Cairns region". That is timely news for Cairns and the region, though not before time. I am pleased to say that only last week I celebrated my 20th anniversary in Cairns.

**Mr McGrady:** Your 20th birthday.

**Ms BOYLE:** My 20th birthday as a Cairns local. During those 20 years I have, of course, visited the Cairns Museum on many occasions. The Cairns Museum is run by Les Sim, the Cairns Historical Society and very substantially staffed by volunteers. What I had not been aware of until recently was the network of museums, volunteers and other people who care about our history who are housing important collections and attempting, in small and difficult premises, to showcase those collections right across the region of far-north Queensland. There is much that is instructive for us in our history. On its recent anniversary, I congratulated the Cairns Historical Society on the collection of footage of old Cairns that has been put together and is now available for us all to see. I am sure that it will be as instructive for other members in their electorates as it was for me to see that, although the appearances may change, the underlying issues stay the same. In the footage of the twenties and thirties in Cairns, water supply was an issue. The provision of transport services—particularly railways—was an issue. The issue of jobs and employment was mentioned on many occasions, as was the Cairns Hospital and the pressure on this facility. It may be that the mandate that I have now is some years down the track, yet the significant issues in the region of Cairns have not changed.

Of course, as the House well knows, Cairns has been through a period of rapid development and has changed dramatically, particularly in the last 15 years. The City of Cairns is not as fortunate as the City of Townsville, which has many fine historical buildings that have been well maintained and which can preserve in built form the region's history. In Cairns, many of our older buildings were not worthy of heritage rating and have been mowed down for development. That makes it even more important for a place such as Cairns and the far north to find other means to house our history, to keep it close for schoolchildren, those who need to be educated about the past in order to prepare for the future, and for the very many visitors to town. The rough estimate is that the Cairns area has at least 10,000 visitors on average each night. In discovering the unusual city in the tropics and the diversity of the region of far-north Queensland, visitors very often wish to discover some of the history via a museum. Of course, there are those of us who, during recreation time, enjoy the exploration of times past, of lifestyles now past. How then in Cairns and the far north to best put together our history and to showcase it is a question that has been asked for some years by concerned locals, yet it has not been answered properly.

It is my hope that, with the appointment of the museum development officer, with the continued enthusiasm of the many volunteers across the region for showcasing and preservation of our region's history—and with my small part—we may be able to come up with a way of putting the jigsaw pieces together. It is probably not widely known that there are museum groups and historical societies in the communities around Cairns, including Innisfail, Mareeba, Atherton, Port Douglas, Cooktown and Chillagoe. All those components must not be lost. I know it has been the ambition of some in the past

to have a conventional museum in the City of Cairns; however, that is not presently available to us in terms of planning and funding. At first thought, it may not take account of the regional needs and the collections across the broader regions. One example of those is the collection put together by a single individual, Mr Jeff Andersen, of war-related memorabilia. Through his commitment and his genuine interest, he has, over a period of years, developed a very significant collection related to the far north's participation in the wars that have been, unfortunately, so close to our shores. That memorabilia is partially supported presently by the Cairns RSL, but it has no permanent home. There is no way that the broader public as well as visitors to the region can enjoy it and explore it.

Knowing that we need a way to preserve our history, that it is precious, that we need people who can care for it and that it is necessary for education as well as for inquisitive and nostalgic recreation, our task ahead, hopefully with the assistance of the museum development officer, is to answer the questions of how best to house it, how best to coordinate it, how best to showcase it and, of course, how best to fund it.

A study recently completed by a committee headed by Senator Lyn Allison has published its report. That report, I understand, is available now at our Queensland Parliamentary Library. I will quote a particular part of that report, because I believe it is relevant to those of us in Cairns who are committed to a museum project. The report states—

"The Committee's evidence, though anecdotal, suggests that on the whole museum/gallery fees do significantly discourage visitation, causing a deadweight loss of welfare which the Committee regards as regrettable."

This then presents for us the conundrum of not only capital costs probably going to be required in order to find the way to house safely and showcase the region's artefacts but also the requirement for additional, recurrent costs. Although the resource is important to the community, the community's willingness to pay substantial entry fees seems limited.

The other important aspect that those of us who are going to work on this project will need to attend to over the next several years is the theme for any museum or collection of museums in the far-north region. It has been suggested by some that we should take advantage of our natural attributes of the Great Barrier Reef and the tropical rainforest and work in conjunction with what are already world-famous attributes of the far-north region of Queensland. Another element of our museum in the far north must be the proud history of the indigenous people and their surviving cultures, although frequently we are not proud of the events that have occurred historically along the way. The far north is home to one third of the indigenous population of Queensland. We hope that their participation and their cultural contribution to our museum would contribute to further advances in reconciliation.

Beyond the indigenous people and their cultures, far-north Queensland was multicultural long before it was fashionable to use that word and recognised the positives of a blend of cultures. We have a proud history of Chinese, Malaysian and Japanese people who settled in the far north as well as the Italians and the Irish and people from Papua New Guinea and the Pacific islands. Further, the wave of tourism of recent decades has contributed to the tremendous social diversity. That is my own preference: that it be in whatever form a social history museum in the tropics.

I hope that the several studies that have been done already, along with the continuing assistance of local volunteers, the museum development officer, my own small contribution and I hope, with respect, that of the member for Barron River and other local members will bring us to an agreed concept of a plan for a museum collection in far-north Queensland prior to the end of this term of Government. I certainly place on record my sincere commitment to work to develop that plan.

Time expired.

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