



Speech by

**DESLEY BOYLE**

**MEMBER FOR CAIRNS**

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**CAIRNS CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT REVITALISATION PROGRAM**

**Ms BOYLE** (Cairns—ALP) (12 p.m.): I rise with pleasure to report to the House on progress with one of the Beattie Government's most important projects in Cairns, the \$10m Central Business District Revitalisation Program. This program had been a promise during the election campaign last year—a promise that was able to be made by the now Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development, the Honourable Jim Elder, and me as the then candidate for the seat of Cairns. It was able to be made by Minister Elder because he understands well the particular needs of Cairns through his previous experience as Minister for Business, Industry and Regional Development and as Minister for Transport.

It is time now to carry out that program. The Minister has appointed me as chair of an advisory committee to oversee the development of a blueprint for the revitalisation of the city area. Some words of background are relevant in highlighting the need for this program in the City of Cairns. In common with many other central business districts around the country and, I dare say, overseas, there has been a loss of vitality and increasing difficulties experienced by the retail sector through an increase in the number of shopping centres in suburban areas and an increase in the proportion of shopping conducted at those shopping centres rather than the residents in suburban areas taking the time and the trouble to go into town to do their shopping. Some 18 months ago the retail sector in Cairns drew attention to their plight of a loss of business through insufficient numbers of people spending sufficient amounts of money in their shops. Since that time we have seen an increasing number of vacancies and, unfortunately, empty shopfronts on the main streets of Cairns.

The previous State Government had done nothing substantial to address this matter. A survey of the retailers was the best that it could manage. That survey told us what we knew already: that there were not sufficient numbers of people in the city spending sufficient numbers of dollars in the shops. However, I am pleased to say that, under the Minister for State Development, we have extended those surveys and received much more useful information from the people of Cairns—from those who work in the city; from those who have businesses in the city, retail and otherwise; from those who travel in from the suburbs for different purposes; as well as from those in the region who visit Cairns City as the city in their region.

The blueprint that the advisory committee will develop will take us some several months. In June of this year I hope to present to the people of Cairns the first draft of the blueprint for their consideration before bringing it to Brisbane to the Deputy Premier for his further consideration. Within that blueprint we will be able to specify exactly how that \$10m should be spent.

I am pleased to inform the members of this House that the advisory committee has appointed a project management team to assist us, not to do new reports or new studies. Thanks to the considerable and up-to-date efforts of the Cairns City Council, the Cairns Port Authority, and other authorities in the town, we have the raw data, as it were, on transport, on traffic management, on the usage of the city, on landscaping plans, on development controls. We have that base information. We need from our project managers the assistance to pull all of that information together into a document, a blueprint, that will focus on the city's revitalisation. I would like to congratulate particularly those who won this important job for Cairns—project managers Planning Far North, which is led by Bruce Hedley and is connected with Buckley Vann, a Brisbane firm led by Chris Buckley. Additionally, the company has a connection with Conybeare Morrison in Sydney. Darrel Conybeare, the senior partner in that firm, brought to Cairns his expertise from around the world as well as from around Australia and spoke with us in Cairns about the most likely areas in which our blueprint should be developed.

Unfortunately, although it was the urging of the Deputy Premier that this planning not become a talkfest and that the blueprint be provided within three months, I have to report to him and to the House that, in fact, at the moment a talkfest is exactly what is happening. This project has captured the imagination of people in Cairns and the region so much that we are all talking about it. Last week when Darrel Conybeare visited, he made a public presentation at the Regional Art Gallery to about 70 or so people, who were stimulated indeed by those projects that had been carried out in Sydney and in other cities around the world which have contributed to the revitalisation of CBD areas.

For Cairns, I suppose, the key themes that came up over and over again were, first and foremost, that it needs to be a comfortable city for pedestrians to use, a place not only where people can get from point A to B and then to C with ease but also where the process of getting there is so pleasant that they are encouraged, as it were, to linger longer. At the same time we must recognise that, in moving freely on foot, we share these streets with the traffic and that the flexible use of our roadways, our streets and our footpaths is the direction that we should take. Darrel Conybeare's comments were in some ways implicitly critical and yet, I think, correct. He remarked that, although Cairns is a city on the waterfront surrounded by a wonderful esplanade and then curving around into the very interesting area of the Cairns Port Authority, within the CBD itself there is little evidence that Cairns is a waterfront city and that linking the city with the water may well be an important theme in our blueprint. Darrel also remarked that we have a very fine tropical botanic gardens—in fact, one that is world famous to enthusiasts—but presently there is only a little sign pointing north of the city to the botanic gardens. Instead, he suggested that we bring the botanic gardens into the city, that we have across the city fine examples of our tropical plants, particularly of the massive shade trees for which the area is famous, and that these be appropriately labelled and recognised as an element of the botanic gardens in the city.

Darrel also made some comments about the need for better lighting. I give recognition to the efforts made by the council to date but I must say that there is a need for further lighting, particularly for those balmy evenings in Cairns when we would hope to have very many more thousands of people present in the city area. Darrel made mention of the need for greater comfort in the city, through providing awnings to protect people from the rain and the sun and through seating on which we can take respite breaks or watch the extraordinary passing parade. Cairns has a proud history of being a truly multicultural city. The passing parade, particularly with the influence of our fame as an international tourism destination, is indeed a passing parade of some diversity and interest.

Darrel also made mention of the importance—probably for all CBDs but certainly for ours in Cairns—of encouraging not only high-rise and high-priced residential development in the city but also affordable residential development so that international students, our own students, hospitality workers, shiftworkers, or those of us who would like to experience city living can easily and in an affordable way find a place within the city to live. We talked of the importance of Cairns being a 24-hour city so that whether people arrive in Cairns at 4 a.m. on an international flight or whether they drive into Cairns towing a caravan, having come all the way from Victoria, facilities are open and available for them for their comfort, information, safety and shelter so that they can begin what will hopefully be a grand experience during their time in Cairns.

Of course, we also talked about the employment opportunities that will flow from this revitalisation plan. I am particularly keen to look for employment opportunities through Minister Braddy's Jobs Plan that will allow us to keep the city clean and safe and to have a presence on the city streets to provide information to visitors. Those jobs may be the kinds of jobs that people who have some physical limitations, whether due to age or disability, can take, albeit on a part-time basis, yet make an important contribution to their city as well as to our prosperity.

The Cairns Convention Centre's logo is "Serious business in a stunning location". I put to the honourable members of this House that, wonderful as that logo is, through the CBD revitalisation program we will be able to add some others, such as "Easy living in the City of Cairns".

Time expired.

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