



Speech by

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**MEMBER FOR CAIRNS**

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### **REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**Ms BOYLE** (Cairns—ALP) (11.54 a.m.): I rise to speak today about a matter that I am sure all members of this honourable House would agree is an important matter for Government, and that is regional economic development. While we might all agree that those words are important, the exact way in which Government contributes to regional economic development is a very much more difficult issue, as has been shown by the various programs through which the Queensland Government has attempted to assist regions with their economic development over many years.

It is a difficult issue because, region by region around the State, there needs to be a fairness in the way that different kinds of programs that are delivered. It is difficult because there needs to be a fairness to each of the industry sectors within a region and yet, at the same time, regional economic development is not something that is the same around the State. It is something that requires us, of course, to take advantage of a region's competitive advantages.

In particular today I would like to report on progress in Cairns and the far north with some exciting programs under the heading of regional development, guided—led, in fact—by our Deputy Premier, the Honourable Jim Elder, who is also the Minister for State Development and Minister for Trade. It is no accident, I might remind members, that he was the Minister for Business, Industry and Regional Development at the time that the regional economic development strategy in Cairns was commissioned by his then department. That strategy, in fact, has been a very important foundation on which the economic development of the region is now progressing.

After Mr Elder's tenure as Minister for Business, Industry and Regional Development, during the period of the Borbidge Government nothing much happened in the area of regional economic development—at least in the far north. It was a forgotten subject—our previous efforts were forgotten. I must, however, recognise the formation of the Cairns Regional Economic Development Corporation, which during that period went ahead of its own accord and is now, in partnership with the Department of State Development, leading the programs of which I wish to speak today.

Several weeks ago in Cairns we held what was called a cluster muster, a muster of the economic development clusters which have formed under CREDC and the State Development Department's programs. Clusters are groups of related industry players in a particular sector, related and sometimes competitors, but nonetheless generally working in that industry sector and sometimes in a complementary fashion. So we now have clusters in the far north focused on food, health, education, fishing, information technology and other areas. These clusters have taken some time to form, to meet, to formulate an agenda and to build a trust and confidence in doing business together. It was at the recent cluster muster, led so ably by the chairman of CREDC, Pat Flanagan, who was on the day referred to as the cluster muster master, that we heard of the progress of each of the clusters in Cairns.

I would like to bring to the attention of the House some of those important initiatives. It was indeed important to hear that the fishing industry, self-evident in its importance for the far north, probably the third largest contributor to the regional economy and home, of course, in Cairns and the far north to Australia's largest fishing fleet, has got together and formed a company to advance its joint agenda. I look forward to the increased importance that fishing will have and to the additional contribution that will be made to the stabilising of the regional economy through the progressive growth of the fishing and marine sector.

The construction industry with its long history of having been a robust competitor for business both within our region and external to the region has itself formed into a cluster. It is, may I say, somewhat encouraged by our Beattie Government's moves through the Minister, Rob Swarten, to reform State Purchasing Policy and to ensure that regional companies in construction and in capital works areas, as well as in other areas, are given a fair go and a fair share of the Government work available. Through their joint action in the cluster, however, they are hopeful that it will not be long before Brisbane will be complaining that the combination of the skills and expertise of companies in the far north is raiding contracts in the south-east corner of the State.

The food cluster is a really important cluster for the far north. Of course, we know that there are particular and exciting tropical fruits and other foods that are grown on the Atherton Tableland. Farmers have not previously been in a position, however, to take the time and develop the expertise to source overseas markets for their products and to assess the particular niche markets that might be available for some of the exotic produce from the tablelands. Nor are they experts in transport and export processes. This strategy combines all of those who are part of the food chain—from the growers on the tablelands right through to those who will source the markets, sell to the markets and present the product from our tablelands to exciting cities such as Singapore and New York.

In the process of developing our food strategy and these linkages, we are emphasising the development of a tropical cuisine. I am sure that honourable members who have travelled, whether just around Australia or overseas for that matter, will recall the meals they have had on their tours. They will remember the restaurants, hotels and even street vendors who have provided some dreadful food for them. This will have stayed in their memories, as will those restaurants or those very special meals that do form such an important part of the holiday and even business experience when travelling. It is our ambition in Cairns, therefore, that the food strategy will also contribute to the development of our tropical cuisine so that members who visit Cairns and tourists from far flung areas in Australia and overseas will find that the tropical cuisine of Cairns is an increasingly important part of their experience.

I am pleased to say that our tourism cluster, which was formed many years ago, is looking to expand and to find ways in which supporting industries in Cairns can add to their business and to tourism. For example, the manufacturers of furniture, of tableware, are looking at ways they can showcase their products better through our tourism hotels and resorts.

Exciting opportunities are offered through the information technology cluster. We have considerable expertise in this area in the far north and we are already selling product to destinations overseas. At the moment the IT cluster is working on a project relating to information in public areas of the CBD. I am sure that this will be an important contribution to the Cairns CBD revitalisation program.

Two further clusters are taking a somewhat different tack. These are the arts and culture cluster and the professional services cluster. These clusters have two jobs to do, as it were. While they certainly wish to optimise their own direct industry opportunities by working together in their clusters, they have also recognised that both are clusters which value add to the other clusters. The arts and culture cluster can add to the tourism experience. It can add to information technology in both design and content. It can add also to the construction industry by incorporating aspects of culture and heritage and artistic design that will make a construction more than simply a building. In the same way, the professional services cluster adds to the other industry clusters.

This is exciting regional development and a new age in regional development allowing each sector to proceed at its own speed—as fast as it is able. I am sure that over the next several years we in Cairns will see businesses retained and expanded, which is the core purpose of the Cairns Regional Economic Development Corporation. I offer my congratulations to John Dean, who so ably leads CREDC in partnership with Minister Jim Elder and the Department of State Development. Together they are looking after the economic development of the far north of Queensland very well.

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