



Speech by

**Dr LESLEY CLARK**

**MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER**

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**CAIRNS CAMPUS, JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY**

**Dr CLARK** (Barron River—ALP) (7.08 p.m.): This evening I draw the attention of the House to the issue of the future development of the Cairns campus of the James Cook University and adjacent State land at Smithfield in the heart of the Barron River electorate. Members of this House who were here when I last served as the member for Barron River will be familiar with my close association with and support for the development of the Cairns campus of the James Cook University, of which I have spoken on several occasions.

During my period in office, I was instrumental in securing protection for some 260 hectares of rainforest hill slopes that form the backdrop to the university and provide a living laboratory for research and teaching, as well as recreational opportunities. On returning to office, I have taken up a new challenge, mainly facilitating the planning and development of an area of approximately 40 hectares of State land adjacent to the Cairns campus. This land was earmarked for residential development but, as a result of a strong and united campaign from the university, the Cairns City Council, local business and the community of which I was a part, during the final months of the coalition Government the contract to sell this land was allowed to lapse, thereby securing a unique opportunity for the 90 hectares of land comprising both the Cairns campus and the State land to be developed as one parcel in an integrated manner.

Last November the Deputy Premier, Jim Elder, appointed me to chair a steering committee to consider issues relating to the development of a master plan for the integrated site and to prepare a business case to support the establishment of a technology and research park on the State land adjacent to the university. The steering committee consists of representatives from the university, the Cairns Regional Economic Development Corporation, the Chamber of Commerce, the EPA, the Departments of State Development, Natural Resources, and Families, Youth and Community Care, and the Cairns City Council and an open invitation is extended to the member for Cairns to attend when she is available. State Development also provides the secretarial support to the committee, and I wish to record my thanks to Maurice Downing from the Cairns office in that regard.

The committee developed terms of reference for a consultancy to develop a business plan, and it will closely examine the feasibility of options currently being considered for the site. Most importantly, the master plan must make provision for the expansion of the campus to cater for an ultimate enrolment of between 7,000 and 10,000 students, with on-campus accommodation for some 1,500 to 2,000 students. It is anticipated that at some stage in the next 10 to 15 years the Cairns campus of the James Cook University will be of sufficient size to be economically viable as a separate university and become the regional university for far-north Queensland. Although it is essential that sufficient land is made available for the growth of the university, the timing of the construction of any additional facilities is dependent upon Federal funding.

We also hope to encourage the expansion of research efforts. In addition to the research being carried out by students and staff at the university, the CRC for Tropical Rainforest Ecology and Management—CRCTREM—is located on the Cairns campus. There is an opportunity for Cairns to become a world leader in rainforest research and management and for the Cairns campus to be the site for the establishment of additional research or management bodies, both Government and industry, carrying out work across a range of areas appropriate to the location in the tropics.

A third element being considered for inclusion in the master plan is a technology or business park. The commercialisation of research that would transform big ideas into big business has the potential to significantly diversify our economy and reduce dependence on tourism and agriculture. In particular, technology-based businesses are the way of the future, which is moving from commodity-based to knowledge-based industries. There is broad community support for the concept of a technology park in Cairns.

Last week, members of the steering committee travelled to Adelaide and Perth to investigate successful models for technology parks and determine which ideas had applicability to our local situation. The visit was extremely valuable and had many lessons for us in Cairns, in particular the need for us to forge strong collaborative partnerships among the university, Government and business and to build on our competitive advantages. I will report more about that to the House later.

Although the development of a technology park of some kind in Cairns presents an exciting challenge, there is a fourth element under consideration for the master plan which will make our university site unique, namely, the capacity to host world-standard mountain bike events utilising both the rainforest mountain backdrop and the infrastructure associated with a university. Already there have been three successful international competitions staged at Smithfield, which have been estimated to generate both indirectly and directly up to \$20m to the Cairns economy. The development of a master plan for the Smithfield site is a unique and exciting challenge and I look forward to continuing to work with my committee to achieve our ultimate goals of enhancing the regional economy, creating new business and generating further employment.

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