



Speech by

Mr ROB MITCHELL

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

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TOURISM LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr MITCHELL (Charters Towers—NPA) (2.37 p.m.): I rise to speak briefly to the Tourism Legislation Amendment Bill, especially in relation to regional tourism. As everybody would know, tourism is the fastest growing industry in Australia, especially in Queensland.

I had the honour on Saturday of opening the inaugural Goldfest held in Clermont. I had the chance to talk to many tourists who were very impressed with the work and effort shown by the locals in holding such a fest. In my opening address, I did mention that centres such as Clermont and other towns in the Charters Towers electorate really must tap into the ever-increasing tourism market in Queensland. I mentioned that this can be done in many ways, such as self-promotion and self-help at a community level.

One of the main topics that I mentioned was the need for further assistance right across Queensland to promote these events to the wider community of Queensland and Australia. I believe that this is where Governments need an input. However, I do not have to tell most members of this House that rural and regional Queensland has much to offer tourism, the State's economy and, therefore, the growth in the economy of rural towns.

The other subject discussed was accessibility to destinations in rural Queensland. The member for Toowoomba North mentioned this in his contribution. By this I mean improved road conditions for tourists who are not used to driving in those areas. I have had to come to their assistance a few times on some of the roads out there, especially people with caravans who were overtaking or even just being passed by road trains. The road trains seem to take up a bit too much room on the road, and many people have come to grief and I have had to help them. That problem applies to buses, caravans and private vehicles.

Over the past couple of years, since the completion of the Gregory Developmental Road between Charters Towers and Clermont and another section of road on the southern end of the inland highway, there has been a huge increase in the number of travelling public—not just threefold but at least tenfold. This number has increased dramatically because the roads have improved and people know that they can now access those areas.

There is a little more to be done on that road. In the last two weeks I have had to help some people who got into difficulties on a narrow section of the road. People are not aware of the difficulties they can experience when they are towing a caravan on those roads, especially when they have to pass big lorries. We have been arguing with the Department of Main Roads for the past 18 months about the erection of signs on the road. Such signs would inform motorists of what is ahead of them with regard to overtaking and passing heavy vehicles.

I believe the Government has a great opportunity to assist in the promotion of centres along the highway between Brisbane and Cairns. The committee concerned with the inland highway is seeking the Government's approval for the logo "Ernie the Emu". I believe the use of the logo will further promote all the centres along the highway.

The completion of the Winton-Hughenden Road will finally see the connection of the dinosaur/fossil triangle which covers the Winton/Hughenden/Richmond area. The completion of the road will complement tourist travel to the Stockman's Hall of Fame in Longreach. It will allow tourists to

take in the museums in the other centres. In that way, everyone will have a share of the available tourism. If the roads are in good condition, the tourists can go from venue to venue. A lot of people are interested in fossils. I believe we will see an increase in tourism in this area.

I believe the Minister has been to the area, so he will know what I am talking about when I refer to the condition of the roads. I hope these matters will be finalised within the next two years—

Mr Johnson: He should come for a trip with me.

Mr MITCHELL: Don't go for a trip with him, mate; he's dangerous, I can tell you. Most of the regions need assistance with the initial infrastructure costs to further enhance and improve the existing drawcards in these rural centres.

This week I will be receiving a submission from the Belyando Shire Council and the Clermont Progress Association for assistance for the proposed Mining Hall of Fame which is to be established in the town of Clermont. This matter has been in the pipeline for some years. We are looking at all opportunities.

We have the opportunity to purchase the now vacated Blair Athol single men's quarters, offices and recreation hall. These buildings are in immaculate condition. They have been well looked after by the staff. This asset is there for the taking. No-one is using these buildings which cover a whole block in the centre of town. It will not cost a great deal of money because we do not have to erect any buildings. We are simply looking at the purchase price. It is important that we have the backing of the Belyando Shire Council.

The site can be purchased for a nominal fee which will be worked out in the next few weeks. It will save somewhere in the vicinity of \$1m which was the cost of the first proposal which involved the use of a greenfield site. It is too good an opportunity to pass up. We need this initial assistance, but we believe that it will be a self-funding project in the future. There is currently a fully equipped gymnasium on the site which can be used by the public. The company has already said that it will lease back one of the buildings for the use of people visiting the town. If we do not acquire these buildings we will find that some other private enterprise will move in.

Clermont was the first area to implement the fossicking licence and the fossicking kit for designated areas on freehold and forestry land. This has been a tremendous success. We need to promote these attractions. Pamphlets are available, but I believe that we need the assistance of Government to advertise these attractions to a wider group of tourists. The area has many other attractions.

The town of Richmond is a prime example of self-promotion and local motivation. I think the Minister has been to the area. He is nodding his head in agreement. He has seen these things for himself. Richmond's self-promotion can be witnessed by the world-class Marine Fossil Museum which stands proudly in the main street of the town. Fossils housed in this museum have been proven to be the best of their type in the world. World authorities have viewed these fossils.

A group of locals from the shire council and from the museum committee operated a promotional stand at the Royal Brisbane Exhibition. These people reported that they were so swamped by visitors that they eventually ran out of promotional material. People were interested to know what Richmond had to offer. The people operating the stand were quite overwhelmed. The mayor of the shire council said the reception in Brisbane was quite fantastic. These people came and ran the stand on a volunteer basis. Perhaps in future we can advertise the museum in Sydney and Melbourne. In that way we will entice more visitors to the area. I am pleased for the people involved that this venture was such a great success.

The Flinders Shire Council is seeking assistance to further extend the current dinosaur display centre to enable it to display further fossils and museum items which are currently stored elsewhere. The display centre houses the initial replica of the Muttaborrasaurus—a very popular drawcard in that area. We need to outlay further funds to improve the attraction so that more tourists will come to our area.

I believe that Charters Towers sells itself because of its history and heritage but, as with all other centres, it needs ongoing assistance for promotion and the upgrading of current facilities. The Charters Towers City Council and the Dalrymple Shire Council, together with Sue McClelland, the tourist promotion officer, and the many volunteers, do a tremendous job in promoting Charters Towers as a tourist destination. Charters Towers is now working well with the City of Townsville. There are many bus trips from Townsville to Charters Towers during the week and on weekends. Charters Towers is a very sought-after destination and we must keep promoting it. We have much to show people in this area.

I was pleased to read in the Minister's second-reading speech of the Government's commitment to the regional communities program by ensuring that regional tourism interests are addressed by giving rural communities a say in the Government's policy development and in the decision making

process. The people on the ground know exactly what they want. It is not a matter of Governments telling people what they are going to give them.

We talk about consultation, but sometimes that does not happen. Consultation is really needed in these areas. I would like to think that this process will continue in the future. We need initial help to put the infrastructure in place. We need to promote our centres in Queensland, in Australia, in Asia, and perhaps elsewhere in the world. It is vital that we have decent road access. One highway has now been completed. Once it is all in place we will see many more tourists coming to the area. We have tourism development officers in all regions and they are doing a great job.

We need value adding of existing tourism products and we must further develop our existing products. We need tourism packaging research and development. When people go to north Queensland they like to be able to continue on to Hughenden, Richmond, Winton and Longreach. If it is all in a package, they know exactly where they are going to go. It does not help if tourists simply fly into a town and do not know what is going on. There are vast distances between the centres in my area. If tourists could be told that they have to travel 200 kilometres the next day to be at a certain venue, they can plan their holidays around such information. It is important that tourists be given a time frame. They must be told the conditions they have to face.

We must also develop new tourist attractions and products. We must continue to support existing tourism operators. We have tourism operators in all these small towns, but they do not receive the promotion they deserve. If we can promote these people, it makes it so much better not only for the tourism operators but also for people who are travelling so that they can set their time frames around those tourist attractions. The change in the name of the QTTC does not bother me at all as long as the members of the corporation have their fingers on the pulse and really work for the benefit of all centres in Queensland.
