



Speech by

Hon. R. SCHWARTEN

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

Hansard 28 April 1999

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Woorabinda Aboriginal Community Projects

Hon. R. E. SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton— ALP) (Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing) (10 a.m.): Mr Speaker, I seek leave to make a ministerial statement.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Leave granted.

Mr Hamill: Can you quote a bit of Shakespeare, too?

Mr SCHWARTEN: I just did. I said, "Out damned spot!" I was referring to those members. Mr Speaker, I seek leave to make a ministerial statement.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I gave you leave a moment ago.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I could not hear because of the rabble opposite. I hope when those students go to represent this country in the United States they do not behave as those people over there behave.

I wish to inform the House of progress on the employment and training program being run at the Woorabinda Aboriginal community. In July last year, shortly after becoming Minister, I instructed the Department of Public Works to work with the people of Woorabinda to provide jobs and training in the planned redevelopment of local health facilities.

The aim was to provide the community with its own construction and maintenance skills as a forerunner to developing similar programs at other Aboriginal communities. This would enable communities to achieve self-sufficiency in the development and maintenance of local facilities.

At Woorabinda, a partnership between Q-Build, the Woorabinda Council and the Federal Government's Community Development Employment Program has helped build the \$2.7m Woorabinda Hospital. Q-Build's Capricornia region won the construction tender and has engaged nine apprentices from the local community on the work since September last year. The overall two-stage project is now 90% complete.

The main hospital project was completed within deadline in March. The second stage—refurbishment of existing health buildings—is about 30% complete and should be finished by early June. The Woorabinda project has offered an opportunity to coordinate programs at different levels of government. It has provided local jobs and training and has established a local skills bank that can be called upon for future projects.

A partnership agreement has been signed between the Woorabinda Council and Q-Build to develop a plan to manage housing maintenance and upgrades for the community. The agreement will coordinate the employment of apprentices and trainees on available work. It will provide council employees with skills in condition assessment, asset maintenance and planning and construction supervision. The Woorabinda model has application in other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Over the next five years, the Department of Housing will implement a \$173m plan to meet urgent housing needs in 34 deed of grant in trust communities. It is possible that the Woorabinda model can be used to ensure that the program benefits local communities in terms of training and jobs.

Recently, I announced construction of a new women's shelter on Palm Island. The \$600,000 project will enable women escaping domestic violence to stay on the island rather than transfer to the mainland. During the Community Cabinet meeting in Townsville, residents of Palm Island told me that they welcomed the go-ahead for the shelter but they also wanted to see greater involvement by local people in such construction projects. They said many people were not aware that suitably qualified tradespeople lived in communities such as Palm Island but were ignored when building projects were being planned.

I am keen to work with communities to find some way to improve that situation. We are doing it at Woorabinda, and we can do it elsewhere. I have subsequently asked the Department of Housing to ensure that a skills audit is conducted in each of the 34 communities to identify existing trade skills as well as opportunities for training young people. The Woorabinda project has worked well and I am keen to see it repeated at other communities to give jobs and trade skills to more young people.
