



Speech by

Hon. R. WELFORD

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

Hansard 10 March 1999

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Cape Moreton Lighthouse Reserve

Hon. R. J. WELFORD (Evertton—ALP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage and Minister for Natural Resources) (9.59 a.m.), by leave: The Queensland Government and the Commonwealth Government, through the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, have agreed to the transfer of ownership of the Cape Moreton Lighthouse and its 159 hectare reserve from the Commonwealth to the State. The former Premier, Mr Borbidge, signed that agreement and the transfer took place on 1 July 1997. As a result that land will be dedicated as national park after 30 June this year.

The Australian Maritime Safety Authority transferred 41 lighthouse properties to Queensland. Seven of those properties contain buildings of cultural significance. The Government is considering options to manage those areas. The options include a call for expressions of interest in relation to the commercial development of the sites. Those options will be subject to further consultation and a consideration of any potential impacts on the conservation values of the surrounding land.

There is no doubt that the Moreton Island site is one of the most spectacular natural assets in Queensland. The land can be rightfully described as the jewel in the crown of Moreton Island—an island which is already 95% national park, in line with its outstanding natural values. The history of this land can be traced back to 1911, when it was vested to the Commonwealth under the Lighthouses Act. The Commonwealth never sought full title to the Cape Moreton property and it has remained, since 1911, under the category of transferred property—vacant Crown land in the right of the Commonwealth.

Under the Australian Maritime Safety Act of 1990, all lighthouse properties held by the Commonwealth were vested in the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, which decided to return them to the States. The AMSA entered into an agreement with Queensland to return the property on Moreton Island on the proviso that it was protected as conservation or national park by 30 June this year.

The Beattie Government intends to provide the level of protection consistent with the natural values of this Moreton Island property. We believe all Queenslanders should be able to enjoy this area as national park. The only current impediment is a small group of people occupying the land illegally. We have now advised these people that they have no rights to remain, and served them with a lawful notice requiring them to vacate as soon as possible. This action should have been taken some time ago.

In fact, the former Minister for Environment, Mr Littleproud, wrote to these people on 21 August 1997 advising that the then coalition Government would "use provisions of relevant State legislation to remove the squatters and their structures". Not surprisingly, they failed to follow through on this action. The Brisbane Lord Mayor, Councillor Soorley, also wrote to these people on 22 September last year, asking them to leave. Mr Soorley stated—

"The illegal settlers' avoidance of land rates and rent over many decades amounts to a gift from the rest of the community worth tens of thousands of dollars to each settler."

The Beattie Government has quite rightly, and legally, taken action to move the illegal squatters. Lawful notices of trespass were sent to them on 12 February this year. Eleven of the estimated 45 owners of illegal structures on the island have already agreed and indicated in writing to my Department of Natural Resources that they will remove their belongings within the required period.

One of the occupants, a Mr Stumer, has written to my department offering to donate some of his remaining materials to the Queensland Government. Mr Stumer concludes his letter by stating, "I support the Government's responsible decision to remove all squatters from Northpoint", that area being part of the lighthouse reserve.

Some of the illegal squatters are attempting to get the Beattie Government to change its mind and to allow them to stay. I wish to advise the House and the Opposition that my Department of Natural Resources has offered every assistance to these people to vacate the island in an orderly manner. We have even offered to help with rubbish removal.

There is no doubt that the natural values of this land are unique. It is a spectacular natural asset on the doorstep of south-east Queensland and we expect it to become one of the State's most popular recreation areas. Our intention to create a new camping area and day-use facility and renovate one of the lighthouse service buildings as an interpretation centre, to the benefit of all Queenslanders, will be greatly welcomed by the broader community. By adding this land to the Moreton Island National Park, we will protect its unique features for future generations and open up one of the State's most significant natural recreation areas for everyone to enjoy.
