



Speech by

**Mr S. ROBERTSON**

**MEMBER FOR SUNNYBANK**

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#### **NORTH QUEENSLAND BIOTECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY WORKSHOP**

**Mr ROBERTSON** (Sunnybank—ALP) (7.06 p.m.): Last Tuesday it was my pleasure to be at the Australian Institute for Marine Science in Townsville to open the North Queensland Biotechnology Industries workshop. The purpose of the workshop was to bring together, for the first time, principal stakeholders in biotechnology to discuss how they can collaborate to achieve biotechnology-led economic development in north Queensland.

The Beattie Labor Government is committed to the development and marketing of Queensland's innovation and technology base. That is why the State Government is currently developing an innovation strategy which will define Queensland's future in this important area.

An area where Queensland has great potential is in biotechnology, which is one of the world's fastest growing enabling technologies. In the next century, biotechnology will have economic, social and environmental impacts which will rival information technology and telecommunications. By next year international trade in biotechnology is expected to reach \$US58 billion per annum.

Queensland already has world-class biotechnology firms such as ForBio, PanBio, Progen and AGEN, to name but a few. We also have existing competitive advantages to build on our biotechnology capability, including excellent research and development infrastructure, megadiverse natural resources, high quality science graduates and the capacity to apply biotechnology to our traditional industry base in agriculture and mining.

The Beattie Government has recognised the importance of biotechnology and has taken positive action to seize emerging opportunities. In February, the Deputy Premier assigned \$15m as our contribution to the joint \$100m building project for the Institute for Molecular Bioscience and the CSIRO Division of Tropical Agriculture at the University of Queensland. This facility will be the largest biological research institute in Australia and will be one of only a handful of similar size in the world.

A task force has also been established to identify longer-term initiatives which will enhance the capacity of biotechnology to create sustainable jobs and wealth for Queenslanders. North Queensland has a strong claim to be an international centre of excellence in biotechnology, particularly in the marine biotechnology area. It has a very strong research and development base, including the Australian Institute of Marine Science, James Cook University, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, CSIRO and the Departments of Primary Industries and Environment and Natural Resources.

An audit of north Queensland's biotechnology capabilities has revealed that a number of areas are already contributing to the economy: genetic testing; DNA identification; tissue culture; molecular biologicals; biomaterials; marine biotechnology; aquaculture and biopesticides, among many others.

Tangible evidence of north Queensland's capacity in biotechnology is the awarding of the International Marine Biotechnology Conference to be held during September and October 2000 to Townsville. We should all be enthusiastic about the role that biotechnology will play in creating a brighter future for north Queensland as well as for the rest of the State. By forming a biotechnology cluster in north Queensland, the participating organisations have an opportunity to be more competitive in applying for research funding and for new infrastructure. They will be able to market and promote more effectively the region's capability in biotechnology and they will be able to cooperate and share the skill base in the region as well as the existing infrastructure base and have a forum in which to discuss and share ideas.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge Dr Peter Isles from the Australian Institute of Marine Science, Vice-Chancellor Professor Peter Moulden and Pro Vice-Chancellor Professor Norman Palmer of James Cook University, Dr Debbie Kuchler, Director of the Australian Tropical Sciences Technology Park and, of course, officers from our own Department of State Development Office in Townsville, among others, who attended the conference for their foresight in organising the north Queensland biotechnology industry workshop.

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