



Speech by

## Mr BRUCE LAMING

### MEMBER FOR MOOLOOLAH

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Hansard 23 August 2000

#### SUNSHINE COAST UNIVERSITY

**Mr LAMING** (Mooloolah—LP) (11.01 p.m.): Tonight it is my pleasure to bring to the attention of the House an exciting project. The Sunshine Coast has a demonstrable unemployment and underemployment problem, especially amongst its youth. Its predominantly small business environment is fragile. New businesses are neither increasing nor diversifying quickly enough to provide good employment opportunities for a rapidly growing population. Unless steps are taken to address business generation, there is the potential for social alienation and instability. An incubator has been the subject of study and discussion over a number of years, but financial support has been inadequate and no champion has emerged to take a leadership role.

However, the Council of the University of the Sunshine Coast has examined its commitment to regional development, which is strongly reflected in the University of the Sunshine Coast Act 1998, in its strategic plan and its degree courses and research centres, all of which emphasise the university's regional role and commitment. The university council has decided to progress the concept of an incubator on its own site and support its development over the long term. It plans to undertake this role with direct and indirect support from other consortium members and the State and Federal Governments. The university council is proposing the development of an incubator named the Innovation Centre, which will take up approximately 3,000 square metres and be worth \$5m, to be built on the university boundary land worth \$500,000 and to be completed early in 2001 for full operation in mid-2001.

Initially the incubator space would occupy one-fifth of the total available space and the remainder would temporarily be used for university purposes, including location of relevant safety activity. As the incubator grows in popularity, unrelated university activities will be progressively removed and within a decade the whole building could be utilised for incubation-related purposes. In this way, the university is reconciling the long-term interests of the region with its own short-term interests to justify the promotion and coexistence of both sets of interests.

The location of the Innovation Centre, directly accessible from an external roadway, will possess a degree of separation from the university core, thus avoiding the perception that it is part of the university. It is important that the business community perceives it to function independently of the university to become a self-sustaining entity with increasing economies of scale as it grows. The location of the Innovation Centre is planned to catalyse the Sippy Downs town centre and will be developed as a subregional or district centre serving a population of 50,000 people within a decade or so.

The university is developing research in information technology, marketing, e-commerce and computer-based art and design which will add value to the work of the incubator. In addition to university research being involved, it is also likely that the economic development unit of Maroochy Shire Council, the CEO of the Sunshine Coast Business Development Corporation, the area consultative committee and State Development will directly be involved in the long term.

The university council has decided to access the Queensland Treasury Corporation line of credit to initiate the centre, which it believes is well overdue. The State Development Department has shown considerable interest in the incubator proposal and has recently agreed to provide matching funds to any Federal assistance gained to the level of \$500,000 over the next three years. I welcome this commitment. The university will contribute land for an approximately 3,000 square metre facility and will take out a loan to meet the balance of funds beyond those provided by Governments. Maroochy Shire

Council has allocated a sum of half a million dollars towards the centre with its 2000-01 budget proposals. The final decision on the allocation is expected from councillors this month.

Both the area consultative committee and the Business Development Corporation have expressed support for their desire for long-term involvement but have no funds available to support initial infrastructure and capital costs. I have written to the Federal Government seeking confirmation of its funding and hope that both State and Federal Governments can provide some funding this financial year so that a coordinator can be approved so as to obtain tenants to take up positions in the centre as soon as possible.

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