



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

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FAR-NORTH QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT OFFICES

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (11.41 a.m.): On this important day as we are awaiting the release of the 2000-01 Budget to the Parliament, I rise to speak about some other very important matters. Although these matters do not rate a direct mention in the Budget, they nonetheless are signs of the high-quality service that is provided by the Beattie Government. They are changes to the very structure of Government, particularly in regional Queensland.

Of course, policies are the underlying basis upon which a Government delivers its programs. Although the strategies to administer those programs are very important, another very important element, which has been neglected for very many years by Governments, is the very structure by which a Government works. By changing the structure of Government in the regions, the Government has shown that it is responsive to the needs of the regions and is able to deliver services in a style more suited to the needs of our regions.

Many people in far-north Queensland recognise the tremendous progress that the Government has made through these structural changes. Although in the first instance those people are undoubtedly public servants who work in far-north Queensland, many other people involved in management, industry and the community sectors have seen the changes in the Government's service delivery as a consequence of these structural changes and welcome them. They have been called for from previous Governments, but they have never before been delivered.

Today, I would like to give the House some examples of how the structure of a Government really makes a difference. In the lead-up to the June 1998 election, the Beattie team promised that Cairns and far-north Queensland would be recognised as a region in its own right, rather than as a subregion of Townsville. Additionally, there was a commitment that all State Government departments in Cairns would report directly to Brisbane. Historically, Townsville was the major centre in the north of our State and it was quite right and proper that Government offices had their headquarters in Townsville, with subregional offices—one of which was in Cairns—scattered around the region. However, over the past decade, Cairns has grown rapidly and its needs, as well as those in other parts of far-north Queensland, have diversified. Therefore, the delivery of Government services via Townsville has been accidentally—not intentionally—second rate. As a person stated in a letter to the editor of the Cairns Post, to date the delivery of Government services to far-north Queensland has been a little bit like pass the message. Of course, the more people that the message needs to be passed to on its way to Brisbane, the greater the risk of distortion or the omission of the essential elements of the message.

In June 1998—at the time of the last State election—10 of the 19 State Government departments with offices in Cairns reported via Townsville. I am pleased to say that, two years later, only two Government offices and two subsections of other offices report to Brisbane via Townsville. I thank the many Ministers who have been involved in insisting that, in an orderly fashion, the administrative arrangements be changed so that far-north Queensland can communicate its needs and issues in relation to Government service delivery directly to Brisbane. The remaining offices that do not yet report directly to Brisbane are the Department of Transport and Main Roads, the Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations and the suboffices of Corrective Services and Disability Services Queensland. May I say that, in relation to the Department of Transport and Main Roads and the Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations, the relevant Ministers have considered

this issue and made arrangements towards creating an equitable number of staff in Townsville and Cairns. The administration of those offices will change gradually and it will, therefore, be simply a matter of time before the offices will become fully independent and report directly to Brisbane.

I recognise the good efforts of the Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care, who recently established a regional office of her department in Cairns. For the benefit of the other members of this Parliament, I point out that, during the last sittings of Parliament, the member for Indooroopilly criticised the establishment of this office as a wasteful expense. I note that he is intending to speak in this debate. Therefore, I call on him to withdraw that remark and indicate to the Parliament that he and the other members of the coalition support the direct reporting of the Cairns office to Brisbane.

This issue is particularly important for the people of Cairns as the former Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care, Naomi Wilson, has announced that she will stand for the National Party in the seat of Cairns at the next election. During her period as Minister for Families, she established no independent office—none at all—for the Cairns region; just kept Cairns a subregion of Townsville. So it is a matter of some local interest as to whether or not the member for Indooroopilly, the other members of the present Opposition and Naomi Wilson, who hopes to be the next member for Cairns, will affirm their position that they will withdraw the Cairns regional office of the Department of Families and the other regional offices in the Cairns area that we have fought so hard to establish.

Another of the structural areas of reform for which this Government can take tremendous credit is the change to the State Purchasing Policy. Much of the \$5 billion that has been spent by the Queensland Government has been confined to companies based in Brisbane. While again we can understand that, historically, Brisbane companies have been bigger and more capable, it is indeed time that the new State Purchasing Policy recognises that companies in regional areas that have the capability should be given a go to provide the kinds of services, goods and construction that the Government requires.

The change to the State Purchasing Policy has created a massive shift in the State. My absolute congratulations go to the Minister for Public Works and Housing, Robert Schwarten, and his departmental officers for taking the proposal to change the State Purchasing Policy to Cabinet and winning the support of other Ministers and other directors-general. It means that regions such as Cairns will have very much more in terms of direct Government spending. That means that local companies and local retailers will offer their services directly to regional Government offices to prove the capability of their existing businesses and their ability to expand through hiring apprentices and trainees and other opportunities that could expand their businesses in the long term. The ability of those regional companies to supply products and undertake construction for the Government, thereby employing local contractors, will mean more than any single program that any Government department can deliver in terms of real generated economic growth.

The ability of purchasing officers to consider not simply the lowest price but also value for money, taking into account the Government's priorities in regional development and employment, will make for a very different and much more dynamic spread of Government spending in regional areas. On behalf of the construction industry, which has grown and developed in capability over the past years in the far north, I recognise the importance of the unbundling of major construction projects. Brisbane companies have kept business for themselves because of a belief that letting a tender for one large contract is cheaper for the Government. As construction contracts are unbundled under the State Purchasing Policy, Cairns companies look forward to proving that that is not the case.

I commend the Ministers, particularly the Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care and the Minister for Health, who have recognised the structural importance of the change to three-year contracts, as opposed to one or two-year contracts, to community based organisations delivering services. Importantly, this provides stability of service delivery and employment. These organisations are able to provide better quality services within this longer tenure.

I recognise also the structural change made by the Deputy Premier through the Office of State Development in its contracts with regional economic development corporations. These bodies are private sector driven and non-profit organisations at arm's length from Government and are the appropriate organisations for setting regional economic development priorities. His funding for these is to be commended.
