



Speech by

Dr LESLEY CLARK

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

Hansard 16 May 2000

EAST TRINITY

Dr CLARK (Barron River—ALP) (6.58 p.m.): It is not often that State Governments make truly historic decisions with far-reaching consequences for entire regions, but the purchase of approximately 1,000 hectares of land at East Trinity falls firmly into that category. The decision by the Government to preserve the East Trinity site from development will, I feel sure, be widely recognised in the future as being the right one for social, economic and environmental reasons.

Last week, I was privileged to be in Cairns with Tourism Minister, Merri Rose, and other local members for this announcement and I applaud the Beattie Government for having the courage to take this step. When I was president of the Cairns branch of the Wildlife Preservation Society during the 1980s, along with other local organisations we campaigned against a raft of mega developments proposed for the wetlands of Trinity Inlet and bay. It is worth revealing that just over a decade ago, there were proposals to reclaim the entire Cairns mudflats. It was only people power in the dying days of the coalition Government in 1989 under Russell Cooper in the form of some 5,000 Cairns people demonstrating on the Esplanade that prevented this from happening.

Mangrove-covered Admiralty Island was to be the site of port expansion, marinas and hotels; whilst the ex-CSR land at East Trinity was proposed for a twin city mega-tourism and residential development. The people of Cairns have consistently said no to large-scale wetland development, and the Trinity Inlet management plan, which I helped to prepare in 1992, was a direct response to public opinion at that time. It recommended the retention of all existing wetlands in Trinity Inlet and bay.

The Trinity Inlet Fish Habitat Reserve, declared last year, finally ruled out the prospect of major reclamation of the Cairns mudflats, and now the last remaining threat to the Trinity Inlet from major development has been removed. Finally, the opportunity exists to remedy the mistake of 30 years ago when CSR constructed band walls and cleared mangroves from the site, and we inherited the legacy of an acid sulfate time bomb.

So, where to from here? I would like to see a conservation management plan prepared with the ongoing involvement of the Cairns community. Clearly, the current proposals for trialling remediation measures to address the acid sulfate soil problems need to be supported and encouraged. The current DPI studies examining the impact of leachate on fish life will also be important from the point of view of quantifying the risk to the ecology of Trinity Inlet itself. The vision put forward by "Save Trinity Inlet" organisations of creating a tourism venture around rehabilitation of the site with research facilities, visitor centre, boardwalks to both existing and future wetlands should be taken seriously following the success of the Mareeba wetlands.

The decision of the Government to purchase East Trinity has been criticised by predictable sources, including the Cairns Post editorial, on the basis that it will lock up land that Cairns needs for future urban expansion. This is simply not true. The Far North Queensland 2010 regional plan set out the preferred strategy for the expansion of Cairns over the next 20 to 25 years, and it did not identify East Trinity as the site of future urban development. Instead, it identified other land between Edmonton and Gordonvale which has been earmarked for that purpose.

The purchase of East Trinity will protect our tourism product by ensuring a green unspoilt vista of mangroves and mountains from Cairns city across the inlet that contributes to the experience of Cairns as a natural tropical wonderland. It will also avoid a potential environmental disaster that could occur if the acid sulfate soils on that site were disturbed.

The constant challenge in far-north Queensland is how to minimise the environmental impact of development. In the case of East Trinity, the Government has responded by removing the possibility of development and its associated environmental impact. Unfortunately, it is not going to be so easy to address the environmental impacts of another proposal in my electorate, namely, upgrading the Kuranda Range Road. The capacity of the current road will be reached in the next few years, and the Government will soon release the results of a major study which has examined the impact of various options to upgrade the Kuranda Range Road.

I look forward to reading the results of that study, as I have consistently expressed a preference for a tunnel to be built by the private sector and funded by a toll. It remains to be seen whether this option is viable. I do not underestimate the difficulty of the decisions that face the Government on this issue, as I know that it will not be possible to satisfy all stakeholders. But for now I encourage all of those with an interest in this issue to study the comprehensive impact assessment study report, to engage in constructive debate and to convey their views regarding this report to the Government and to me as the local member.
