



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

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APPROPRIATION BILL, ESTIMATES COMMITTEE G

Mr PITT (Mulgrave—ALP) (3.22 p.m.): I rise to speak to the report of Estimates Committee G, and in doing so I acknowledge the work of staff, both parliamentary and departmental, in providing the support necessary for the committee to discharge its responsibilities effectively. My appreciation is extended to the Chairman, the member for Mansfield, who provided professional leadership to the committee.

I wish to comment on the role played by the Trinity Inlet Management Plan in protecting the ecological sustainability of Trinity Inlet in Cairns. In response to questioning, the Minister for the Environment and Minister for Natural Resources reaffirmed the Government's commitment to TIMP. The Trinity Inlet Management Plan is an agreed non-statutory document that guides the management of Trinity Inlet and environs. It does this through management principles based on ecological viability and sustainability, through management areas based on geography and through management systems based on issues of the day.

The purpose of the Trinity Inlet Management Plan is to seek to ensure coordinated and integrated planning and management between local, regional and State regulatory bodies of the Trinity Inlet ecosystem in line with the overriding principle of management. TIMP means ensuring that the decision-making processes are accountable, coordinated and efficient; they take account of short and long-term environmental effects; they seek to provide equity between present and future generations; and they apply the precautionary principle to the well-being of the inlet. It also means ensuring the sustainable use of renewable natural resources and the prudent use of non-renewable natural resources. It means minimising adverse environmental effects of development and ensuring that urban development occurs in areas where adequate infrastructure exists or can be provided efficiently to minimise the burden on functioning ecosystems.

I seek leave to table a document which outlines the significant achievements of TIMP over the last decade.

Leave granted.

Mr PITT: Trinity Inlet is considered exceptional and worthy of conservation for many reasons. Trinity Inlet supports an extensive area of mangroves exhibiting a range of species and community types, some of which are limited in their distribution elsewhere. The mangroves and other associated wetlands within Trinity Inlet have been recognised as important nursery areas for juvenile fish and prawns of commercial importance. The area supports a range of habitat types that significantly enhances the biodiversity of the region. Trinity Inlet contains habitats that are important to migratory waders of international significance. Remnant habitat types remain in the Trinity Inlet area that are otherwise scarce in the region, for example, sand ridge communities and freshwater wetlands. A number of rare and threatened fauna species utilise Trinity Inlet on a regular basis. The seagrass beds of the area represent one of the only two major inshore seagrass areas between Hinchinbrook Island and Cooktown.

Special care needs to be taken in allocating the remaining environmental resources of Trinity Inlet so as to ensure that those areas and resources play a fundamental role in the ecosystem and its maintenance. Most of the remaining habitat needs to be managed carefully, and the uses occurring in

Trinity Inlet need to be planned to maintain these key areas. The Trinity Inlet ecosystem has limited capacity to accommodate future modification, fragmentation or biological deterioration if it is to remain an ecologically viable and sustainable estuarine system. Most, if not all, of the remaining habitat should be retained and vital areas enhanced or rehabilitated to forge strong links between fragmented communities.

A number of observations can be drawn from a recently completed environmental analysis. The upper reaches of Trinity Inlet, including freshwater wetlands, riparian verges and intertidal waterways, are as important as the core mangrove areas in maintaining ecological functionality. It is important that habitat links between the marine and freshwater areas of Trinity Inlet, as well as to the surrounding hill slopes, remains an important issue. Any further reclamation of the remaining intertidal areas will reduce water quality, productivity and nursery habitat values, while further mangrove removal will increase siltation of waterways.

Retention and enhancement of the fragmented and narrow mangrove/saltmarsh fringe on the eastern side of Trinity Inlet from Hills Creek to Seelee Creek is essential to retain habitat continuity between the inner and outer estuaries. This is a strategic and long-term priority to facilitate the movement of commercial fish and prawn species through the estuary at different stages of their life cycle. Urban growth should focus on utilising existing infrastructure and promote infill development—I refer particularly to the FNQ 2010 documents—with appropriate consolidation and vertical living to maximise infrastructure efficiencies and minimise ecological pressure. Economic growth should be promoted within the ecosystem that can play a role in the protection and enhancement of the local environment, such as ecotourism and appropriate urban form. Any large-scale reclamation along the Cairns Esplanade will impact on productivity, nursery habitat and wading bird habitat and should be planned, designed and managed to minimise such impacts.

I wish to congratulate the Minister and the Government not only on their long-term commitment to the TIMP plan and the health of one of our local icons, Trinity Inlet, but also on the purchase of the East Trinity site.

Time expired.
