



Speech by

**DESLEY BOYLE**

**MEMBER FOR CAIRNS**

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Hansard 30 October 2001

**CAIRNS**

**Ms BOYLE** (Cairns—ALP) (11.40 a.m.): I rise this morning to inform honourable members of the House about the state of play in the fair city of Cairns at this time. Over the last few days, people have kindly asked me, 'How is beautiful Cairns?' I am pleased to report that it is still very beautiful. However, it is in some difficulty. As members would understand, tourism is the prime economic base for Cairns and the urban area of far-north Queensland. The events of 11 September and subsequent attitudes towards and actual activity in tourism around the world, as well as the fall of Ansett, have had a dramatic impact in Cairns.

I am pleased to report that leaders in our business and tourism organisations, and the tourist industry generally, have not been sitting around crying. Instead, they have activated all of their networks and all of their expertise in an effort to recover the situation as rapidly as possible. I am pleased to say that of domestic flights into Cairns, Qantas has restored 80 per cent of the capacity that we had prior to the collapse of Ansett. However, this is not sufficient. Even that 80 per cent is pushed to the limit and there is not a spare seat on a domestic plane in or out of Cairns at this time.

Internationally, I am pleased to report that we have managed to hold on fairly well in the circumstances. Cancellations have not been as great as we had earlier feared. Nonetheless, it is an uncertain circumstance. It is the 'what happens next' more than 'what is happening this week' that is of concern to the industry in Cairns. Cairns is coming into its off-peak season. Many people from around the world and southern Australia do not choose to be in the tropics at Christmas time. As much as I might enjoy it, others choose to come to us in the cooler months of the year.

Nonetheless, the question is, 'What will happen next year?' I want honourable members to do what they can to support Cairns. We have not yet given up on Ansett. It is important that we get Ansett back in the skies so that Qantas, as it has admitted quite properly, has competition not only on the major capital city routes but also on regional routes. We seek the loud lobbying efforts of all in Brisbane to be directed at the administrator to ensure that, regardless of the final decision, Ansett returns to the skies in Cairns. We thank the Premier and Merri Rose, the Tourism Minister, for their tremendous efforts in this regard.

Several other fine possibilities may see us in a much happier position in the year 2002. Cairns is in the running to become the home base of the new Qantas airline to be named, ironically, Australian Airlines. I am tempted to remark that the more things change, the more they stay the same. It would certainly be a great boost to jobs and the tourism industry if Cairns was chosen as the home base for that airline. We expect that Virgin Airlines will tackle the difficult Cairns market early in 2002. Of course, Cairns is a safe and clean destination. While there is a tremendous nervousness about travelling within the United States and among Europeans and the Japanese wishing to travel to the United States, those people may instead choose Cairns and Queensland for their overseas holidays.

It is fortunate that over the past five or so years we have done a lot of work to diversify the economic base of far-north Queensland. Now would be a good time for us to properly study and recognise the fact that we are holding up better because of the greater concentration on tertiary education services, the broadening marine industry, the burgeoning super yacht industry, the growth in IT&T industries and various other industries that are all a part of rounding out the city of Cairns and protecting it against international and national events that can sometimes shake the tourism industry. However, Cairns has a bright future. I hope that, by early 2002, I will have evidence to present before the House to bear me out in that respect.