



Speech by

Hon. JUDY SPENCE

MEMBER FOR MOUNT GRAVATT

Hansard 6 December 2001

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Environmental Health and Jobs in Torres Strait and Cape York

Hon. J. C. SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Families and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Disability Services) (10.00 a.m.), by leave: While the government is making an unprecedented assault on alcoholism and violence in indigenous communities, we are also keeping a strong focus on capital works in remote communities. Last week I took an official role in the delivery of two projects that are driving improvements in the health and lifestyles of the residents of Queensland's northernmost communities.

On Thursday, while in Bamaga, I joined the chair of the Torres Strait Regional Authority, Mr Terry Waia, in signing a \$36 million agreement for the Torres Strait. I then had the privilege of officially opening the second stage of a \$13 million northern peninsula area water upgrade, which is delivering pristine water to five communities near the tip of Cape York. The sign-off on the major infrastructure program in the Torres Strait gives the green light to stage two of a project that is ensuring vital services for some of the state's most isolated communities. During stage two, the state government will spend \$15.3 million on improved water, sewerage, waste disposal and housing subdivisions for the outer islands of Torres Strait. We will also invest \$6.2 million over four years to operate and maintain the new infrastructure—providing employment and training for local people. The Commonwealth, through the Torres Strait Regional Authority, will provide \$15 million over three years.

I signed off on \$15 million in state funding for stage one of this major infrastructure program in October 1998. The Commonwealth matched this funding, and the Torres Strait Regional Authority managed the project. The advances made in the past three years are testament to the professionalism of the authority, which has delivered the project on budget and on time. A number of islands now have new septic systems and toilets, while others have reticulated sewerage systems, package treatment plants and ocean outfall desalination plants. Badu Island, for example, has three new wells and pipelines, a new water treatment plant, and a new reservoir.

I look forward to continuing our partnership with the authority over the next three years, as we further improve the environmental health and living standards in the Torres Strait. After the Torres Strait signing ceremony, I had the pleasure of joining in festivities for the official opening of the northern peninsula area water treatment plant. The plant provides safe, reliable drinking water to the five communities near the tip of the Cape. They are Bamaga, Injinoo, New Mapoon, Seisia and Umagico. It means the 2,000-plus residents of those communities can drink water straight from the tap, whereas previously they were forced to boil water, or risk illness from bugs. They now enjoy year-round reliable water in an environmentally responsible manner.

This water upgrade, which is now into stage three, has also delivered jobs, job skills and business opportunities to locals. The Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy contracts SunWater to operate and maintain the treatment plant. This contract requires SunWater to employ local indigenous people and provide them with career development training. Many residents have gained employment at some stage during the water infrastructure project, and I presented some of the local indigenous employees with certificates in recognition of their contribution.

Importantly, much of our \$13 million outlay is staying in these communities. The major infrastructure program in the Torres Strait and the northern peninsula area water upgrade are worthwhile investments in the health, lifestyle, skills and economy of the region. I look forward to

updating the House on the continuing success of these projects, as well as our efforts to improve the social indicators in remote indigenous communities.
