



Speech by

Hon. STEVE BREDHAUER

MEMBER FOR COOK

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Georgina River Bridge

Hon. S. D. BREDHAUER (Cook—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Minister for Main Roads) (10.00 a.m.), by leave: I am very pleased to report that my two departments, Transport and Main Roads, have shown a maturity and a willingness to move forward in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Through such a partnership we have been able to develop good policies and deliver better services.

Main Roads and Queensland Transport are working on a number of important projects in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Some are individual projects, while others are linked to whole-of-government initiatives such as the Cape York partnership plan and the 10-year partnership.

The local Indjilandji-Dithanoo people of Camooweal have a cooperative arrangement with Main Roads in the construction of a new bridge over the Georgina River, west of the township. The Camooweal bridge project is a wonderful example of what can be achieved when the Queensland government works in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

True reconciliation is reached through understanding and respect, and a deeper understanding and respect for Aboriginal cultural heritage has grown out of this project. An archaeological dig within the bridge easement has led to the discovery of a large number of important Aboriginal artefacts. The artefacts in the Georgina River, unearthed during a study initiated by Main Roads, are considered to be one of the most significant historical records of the Indjilandji-Dithanoo people.

More than 17,000 artefacts were unearthed. They include scrapers, knives, sharpening tools, grinding implements, woodworking tools, spear points, axes, hammers, scoops, spoons, ceremonial implements and ochre used by both men and women. The artefacts are now being catalogued and analysed by both archaeologists and the traditional owners.

The Georgina River bridge project has unearthed one of the most archaeologically significant finds in Australia. The artefacts, which are mostly of stone, are providing detailed information for archaeologists to examine Aboriginal stoneworking techniques from a worldwide perspective. I am advised that we expect these artefacts to be dated at up to 10,000 years old.

It appears that the local Aboriginal craftsmen used very specialised stoneworking methods to manufacture and sharpen their stone tools and weapons. A number of tools so far discovered in the excavation have not been described in historical accounts previously. This excavation will add to worldwide knowledge of the nature and use of these rare tools.

Transport and Main Roads recognises and respects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage, and by providing education, training and employment opportunities they are helping to build communities of which we can be proud. The arrangement covers stage 1 foundation works, which includes provision for training, specific targets for employment and opportunities for the Dugalunji Corporation to supply goods and services. Main Roads will also consider the Dugalunji Corporation's views when selecting the major tenderer for stage 2 of the project.

Work on the first stage of this project began in February. Stage 2, which includes the remainder of the bridge project and the road approaches, will be completed before the 2002 wet season, at a total cost of \$14 million. The bridge includes a centre span of some 42 metres to take into account the cultural significance of the spirit of the rainbow serpent. It is also built to Q50 standard. That is, it should flood, on average, only once every 50 years.

The project is providing employment for approximately 35 indigenous people from the Camooweal area, made possible by an agreement between the traditional owners and a number of Queensland government departments—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, Main Roads and Employment and Training—as well as the federal departments of Transport, Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business. People employed on the project have been largely drawn from the long-term unemployed and are being provided with skills that will give them work opportunities in the future.

Main Roads is also carrying out important work in a number of other areas: an education to employment scholarship scheme, which provides opportunities for young indigenous people to participate fully in community life; and a range of skills development and training initiatives which the department is implementing in collaboration with indigenous communities. These initiatives include things such as career days; management training, through DETIR programs; skills development and training, through the Remote Communities Services Unit; the Thompson River project, which includes the skills audit, training and employment; and the Gracevale project, which is also providing training and employment. The Georgina River bridge project is a clear demonstration of this government's commitment to reconciliation.
