



Speech by

**JAN JARRATT**

**MEMBER FOR WHITSUNDAY**

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Hansard 1 August 2002

**APPROPRIATION BILLS [ESTIMATES COMMITTEE G]**

**Ms JARRATT** (Whitsunday—ALP) (3.53 p.m.): It gives me great pleasure to speak to the report of Estimates Committee G. Even though I was not a member of this committee, the portfolios of Tourism and Primary Industries go to the heart of economic development in the electorate of Whitsunday. Tourism is the third largest employer in the Mackay-Whitsunday region, with 7,600 people employed in the industry. That is 11.7 per cent of full-time equivalent employment in our region. Tourism also has a very positive flow-on effect to other industries such as accommodation, restaurants and cafes as well as retail and wholesale industries and transport and communications businesses. It goes without saying that government money spent in support of tourism in Queensland is an investment in jobs and an investment in the wellbeing of our local communities.

I am therefore delighted to note that the high level of support for Tourism Queensland is set to continue with base funding of \$39.5 million in 2002-03. As a consequence, our local regional tourism organisation, Tourism Whitsundays, can continue to perform its crucial role promoting the Whitsundays to the world. On that note, I put on record my congratulations to John Dean and his team and the board of TW for their outstanding performance and ongoing dedication to the promotion of tourism in the Whitsundays. As an example of the great work being done through TW, I note that it was responsible for attracting \$8 million worth of media publicity to the area, including 15 travel shows screened on national television. Another \$8 million worth of convention and incentive business leads were generated for TW's 330 members. It also coordinated approximately 10 major marketing campaigns to promote the Whitsundays. This type of activity went a long way to saving our local tourism industry in the difficult post-Ansett and September 11 climate.

These two catastrophic events were not the only hurdles faced by the tourism industry in the Whitsundays last year. Unfortunately, the area experienced a much more intense stinger season than in previous years with a dramatic increase in irukandji incidents. Sadly, one of the two fatalities from irukandji occurred in the Whitsundays. I therefore thank the minister for her part in responding to this threat. Tourism Queensland is coordinating a whole-of-government response to the irukandji jellyfish threat. This action has resulted in the formation of two working groups that have considered issues such as public awareness, education, and research and development. The meeting of the working groups in May this year was charged with developing a more detailed action plan to address the irukandji threat. I welcome this initiative and thank the minister for her prompt action.

Prior to the budget this year I lobbied the minister on behalf of the local tourism industry for ongoing financial support for the Whitsunday Convention Bureau. There was some concern that, as the original funding commitment had expired, the Whitsunday Convention Bureau and other regional bureaus would be wound up. Fortunately, Minister Rose and the Beattie government recognised the very important contribution made by convention bureaus and announced a huge ongoing funding boost for these organisations. In part, this was in recognition of the fact that in 2000-01 business tourists spent almost \$40 million in the Whitsundays. This is becoming a major part of our tourism market, and I am very pleased that the minister has seen fit to continue the funding that supports this sector of our local industry.

While many of the budget initiatives have a direct impact on my electorate via the local RTO, other initiatives are set to have a positive if indirect effect. Support for the fledgling Australian Airlines is a good example of how this government is demonstrating commitment to an initiative that, while based in far-north Queensland, will benefit the entire state. Obviously I am keen to explore avenues that will maximise benefits to my electorate, such as strengthening links that will encourage Asian visitors to explore the Mackay-Whitsunday region. I have spoken in some detail about the positive initiatives in the area of tourism, but I turn now to the other major revenue generator in the electorate of Whitsunday—primary industries and specifically the sugar industry.

We all know about the serious difficulties confronting the sugar industry in this state. The sugar-growing area in my electorate stretches for some 150 kilometres—almost literally from one end of the electorate to the other—and so the problems facing the industry are causing a great deal of angst amongst my constituency. The government cannot make it rain and cannot influence the scale of production in Brazil or the prices available to growers. However, we can listen, and have listened, to industry and reacted in a positive way. In May of this year I attended a rally in Mackay where we were given the message that what was needed was immediate assistance by way of assistance to growers to ensure that next year's crop was put in the ground. This was delivered in the budget via a \$20 million sugar cane crop scheme that provides growers access to low-cost loans to replant and fertilise the 2003 crop. This scheme offers low-cost loans of up to \$100,000 per farming enterprise. While I acknowledge that this will not solve the problems for all growers, I place on record my gratitude to the Minister for Primary Industries for listening to the messages coming from industry and for acting to implement an immediate assistance package. I commend the report of Estimates Committee G to the House.