



Speech by

CHRIS CUMMINS

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

Hansard 7 October 2003

TOURISM SERVICES BILL

Mr CUMMINS (Kawana—ALP) (5.40 p.m.): I rise to speak on the Tourism Services Bill 2003, which introduces a registration system for inbound tour operators. Like me, the minister has a passion for ecotourism. Ecotourism is nature based tourism that involves education and interpretation of the natural environment and is managed to be ecologically sustainable. It encompasses tourism which occurs in the natural environment and adventure tourism, such as sea kayaking and diving. I will talk more about the future potential of diving on the Sunshine Coast later in relation to the artificial reef that we are still fighting to get.

Queensland is a leading international ecotourism destination with natural areas that are unique and known world wide. Five of Australia's 11 world heritage areas are in Queensland, including Fraser Island, the central eastern rainforests of the Border Ranges, the Wet Tropics, the Riversleigh fossil fields and the Great Barrier Reef. The state contains many other areas which are of national, regional and local interest.

Ecotourism usually makes up about 27 per cent of the total tourism industry in Queensland and is forecast to grow at 25 per cent to 30 per cent per year. Queensland as a state is also a world leader in ecotourism management, containing more than half the national ecotourism operators with industry accreditation. Queensland's status has been recognised by the United Nations environment program in its decision to support a prestigious international ecotourism conference that was held in Cairns in November 2002. This was particularly significant when one realises that 2002 was designated by the UN as the International Year for Ecotourism. The Queensland government has allocated more than \$10 million over five years to develop Great Walks, a world-class network of long distance walking tracks and low impact visitor facilities in parks and forests across Queensland.

Recently, I was very proud to launch an ecotourism product. We all realise that the Queensland outback and indeed the Australian outback is much more than just a geographical region. Our much-loved outback conjures up romantic images of the real Australia and is held in the imagination of visitors from urban and coastal environments around Australia and indeed from overseas. Right across Australia increased urbanisation also adds to the perceived value of natural, cultural and heritage assets and attractions present in our outback. In the Australian outback the need for adventure, exploration and freedom can be fulfilled and visitors can experience the pioneering spirit—a way of life that has become symbolic of Australia and indeed Queensland.

The product I launched was developed by a Sunshine Coast based businessman and consultant, Tony Balch. Australian Outback Lodges is centred on a uniquely designed, environmentally friendly lodge structure that combines indoor and outdoor experiences. Often complimented for its cost-effective design creativity, the hip Group has been most recently noted for its interiors of Longitude 131 at Ayers Rock Resort while Tony has been involved in numerous hotel and resort developments in Australia and across the world. Australian Outback Lodges is a business with big aims of expanding into the international marketplace. It is an exciting Australian idea which no doubt will join the ranks of those inventions that rapidly go global. This is an ideal example of an enterprise flourishing in our vibrant Smart State business environment. The Beattie government is committed to generating new industries where innovation is a key priority, and I seek leave to table the brochure of Australian Outback Lodges.

Leave granted.

Mr CUMMINS: Businesses such as Australian Outback Lodges need to be recognised for their role in driving growth in Queensland's rapidly developing knowledge economy, so congratulations to Tony Balch and his team. Construction and manufacture of these Australian Outback Lodges will be based on the Sunshine Coast and the Gold Coast, creating real jobs.

I also bring to the attention of the House the prolonged issue of the HMAS *Brisbane*. Not only are the people of the Sunshine Coast sick of waiting in anticipation but so am I, Premier Beattie and the government. I refer of course to the federal government's ongoing inaction to deliver the HMAS *Brisbane* to the Sunshine Coast. I have gone softly, softly on this for the past few months hoping that Mr Slipper would deliver without too much of a red face, but sadly he has again failed us. We are hearing more and more how the federal member for Fisher is out of favour with his own party and of course the federal government, so I have decided that Minister Mal Brough is our last real option.

Yesterday I wrote to Mal Brough, the member for Longman, whose electorate covers part of the Sunshine Coast, in the hope that he can deliver the goods as promised. I have included in my correspondence to Minister Brough relevant documentation outlining this drawn-out saga. I believe that as a federal minister he will obviously have potentially more pull than the long-serving federal member for Fisher.

Mr Shine: He's been demoted, hasn't he?

Mr CUMMINS: He does not class it as a demotion. He has just been removed from one of his parliamentary secretary positions, so you can work that out for yourself.

Mr Shine interjected.

Mr CUMMINS: Yes, I am well aware of the rumours that Mal Brough has his options open for contesting the Liberal preselection process for the federal seat of Fisher and I sincerely apologise to Sunshine Coast residents for not approaching Mr Brough earlier. This issue really needs to be brought to a climax now. I wrote to Minister Brough yesterday stating—

Numerous Sunshine Coast residents and interested parties have asked that I contact you and request that you persuade the Federal Government to deliver on the HMAS Brisbane as an artificial reef/diving site for the Sunshine Coast.

It is no secret that many residents of the Sunshine Coast feel that due to the changes facing our military that the \$3 million federal funds promised, may be now reneged upon. SUNROC, the Sunshine Coast councils, who are working in co-operation, have agreed that the State Government's suggested site for the HMAS Brisbane's final resting place is a far better option than the obviously unsafe preference of Mr Slipper realising his sites' proximity to international shipping lanes.

The State Government is still waiting for a response from Sen. Robert Hill, Defence Minister in relation to our latest correspondence. I am also aware that Premier Beattie is extremely disappointed in the ineffectual representations thus far of Peter Slipper MP in finalising this valuable Sunshine Coast project.

I therefore ask you, as a Federal Government Minister and a representative of part of the Sunshine Coast, to bring to a climax the HMAS Brisbane saga.

In terms of the three Sunshine Coast councils that make up SUNROC, no-one would ever be accused of calling them Labor oriented councils. It is well recognised that the vast majority of them are strong conservatives. Its executive officer, Graeme Pearce, wrote—

This delay is causing much adverse local reaction to the impasse.

...

The three SunROC Councils urge you as Minister for Defence to resolve this impasse by agreeing to the State Government's proposed site in State waters.

We fear that unless this can occur your Government's election promise to locate the HMAS Brisbane off the Sunshine Coast will not be fulfilled.

That letter was dated 4 August this year. Sadly, again we have been let down by the federal government. I again call on the federal government to finish this project off and deliver something for the people of the Sunshine Coast, because the diving industry is crying out for such a positive step.

Since 1998 I have been a member of Tourism Sunshine Coast and worked as a director of the Regional Tourism Authority. I also attended an ecotourism conference which looked into the HMAS *Swan*. I urge the minister to continue to do whatever is in her power as a representative of the state government. Despite the fact that we have become increasingly frustrated at the ineptitude of some federal ministers and their backbenchers. In closing, I commend the minister and her department for the good work they have done. I commend the bill to the House.