



Speech by

Mr D. BRISKEY

MEMBER FOR CLEVELAND

Hansard 13 May 2003

SIR SYDNEY WILLIAMS

Mr BRISKEY (Cleveland—ALP) (11.45 a.m.): On Thursday I will be representing the Premier at the funeral of a great Queenslander, Sir Sydney Williams OBE, in Cairns. Dr Lesley Clark, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier and Minister for Trade in Far North Queensland, the Governor of Queensland, Major General Peter Arnison, and Archbishop John Bathersby will also be in attendance.

Sir Sydney was a visionary with a passion for building the state's tourism and aviation sectors. This distinguished Queenslander was most well known for his good work in the development of aviation and tourism and in particular for his passion for the racing industry in north Queensland.

Born on 10 January 1920, Sir Sydney was raised in Yungaburra on the Atherton Tableland. Today the Williams family property, Williams Lodge, operates as a boutique accommodation facility, sharing the wonder and beauty of the far north with visitors from all around the world.

In 1977 Sir Syd was awarded an Order of the British Empire and in 1983 was knighted in the Queen's Birthday Honours List for community service. He was also the recipient of numerous industry related awards, including the Premier of Queensland's one-off Millennium Awards for Excellence. After serving with the 7th Australian Division Cavalry Regiment in the Middle East and New Guinea, Sir Sydney returned to his beloved north, turning his hand to aviation. A former postwar commander of the 51st Infantry Battalion, Far North Queensland Regiment, with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, Sir Sydney remained honorary colonel of the Far North Queensland Regiment.

Sir Sydney's tourism career began in 1950s when he recognised a need for the airline industry to expand beyond the existing coastal network into key regional areas to serve isolated towns and remote centres. In 1953 he cofounded Bush Pilots Airways, or 'Bushies' as it was affectionately known, which was based in Cairns. This later became Air Queensland.

Sir Syd was involved in the establishment of a range of tourism services and held distinguished roles such as chairman of Lizard Island, chairman of Cape York Wilderness Lodge, board member and deputy chairman of the Cairns Port Authority, patron of the SKAL Club, director of the Reef Trust Casino and chairman of Captain Cook Cruises, North Queensland. He also held positions with Carlton and United Breweries North Queensland Limited, Air Queensland, Albatross Hotel Weipa, Radio 4AM, Far North Queensland Theatres, Willtrac Corporation Limited, the Australian Tourism Commission and the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation.

One of his more well-known business ventures involved the development of Lizard Island. For two years Sir Syd, with his entrepreneurial spirit, used to fly over Lizard Island in a twin-engine plane. He saw the potential of the island and began pestering the then Premier, Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, to call a tender for air services. Finally the Premier listened and the world-famous Lizard Island resort was developed.

In 2001 Sir Syd was recognised by his peers when he was awarded the Outstanding Contribution by an Individual Award at the annual Excellence in Australian Tourism Awards. But many Cairns locals will fondly remember him as the founder of the Far North Queensland

Amateur Turf Club, which annually hosts the Cairns Amateur Race Day, far-north Queensland's equivalent of the Melbourne Cup. Way back in 1958 Sir Syd founded this north Queensland institution, which many of us have attended and enjoyed. His express intent was to bring people from the bush into town to see Cairns and mingle in the big smoke.

This venture turned out to be very successful, and the club's continuing prosperity is a testament to Sydney's spirit and ability to make things happen. This man has helped to shape Queensland's tourism and aviation industries, particularly in the tropical far north, playing an influential role for many, many years. Sir Sydney Williams and his unique airline will remain forever in the memories of those who knew him and those who had the pleasure of working with him.

I have known Syd Williams on a personal basis for many years. He was a gentleman in every sense of the word. He had a love for Cairns and far-north Queensland, but above all else was his love for his family. I know that a lasting memory for his wife, Joyce, and David, his youngest son, will be the two weeks that he recently spent on the north coast with David, Tracey and their two children, Stratten and Harriet. David also advises me that his father was able to see all his 11 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren over the two weeks that he spent with them and the two weeks prior to that that he spent on the Gold Coast. I am sure all members of this House will join me in paying tribute to this great Queenslander and send condolences to Lady Joyce, his sons, John, Brian, Peter and David, and all their families.