



Speech by

**DESLEY BOYLE**

**MEMBER FOR CAIRNS**

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Hansard 11 March 2003

### **CAIRNS**

**Ms BOYLE** (Cairns—ALP) (12.14 p.m.): In terms of the economic prosperity of Cairns and far-north Queensland, tourism is a key player. It is a great industry which has put Cairns on the international map and heaped benefits upon the residents, directly and indirectly. But tourism is not enough. It is a volatile industry. Cairns businesses know this all too well. Changes in international events and changes in the aviation industry can result in dramatic variations in preferred destinations and visitor numbers, with resultant impacts on local employment and training opportunities.

Members should not mistake me. In Cairns we have a magnificent environment, an excellent range of tourism experiences and the best tourism operators in Australia, if not in the world. But the long-term sustainability and prosperity of Cairns requires diversification of the economy. This was recognised as a key plank in the 1993 regional economic development strategy for the far-northern economy. This study, auspiced by the Department of State Development, was ratified in the regional plan. I am pleased to say that I was a member of the steering committee for that study and know well, therefore, the important recognition that it gave to the need for diversification.

The volatility of the last 10 years means that there is now wide-ranging recognition in Cairns of the need for diversification. Residents across the city frequently speak of the value of tourism but agree that it is not enough for prosperity for the future. I recognise the important, sustained and innovative programs that the Cairns Region Economic Development Corporation has initiated over these last four years. The Cairns Region Economic Development Corporation is, of course, financed by this state government. It is an initiative started by the Beattie government in the last term.

The cluster model developed by CREDC led the way in Queensland and, I am pleased to say, has been copied elsewhere. Nonetheless, rather than simply going ahead with the best of intentions, it is high time that a serious review was undertaken of our progress with diversification. Is the far-northern economy less dependent on tourism than it was 10 years ago? Are we compensating for the decline in some agricultural sectors by activity in new areas of competitive advantage? Is the far-northern economy balanced with a spread of diverse skills and employment choices which nonetheless meet the needs of the industry sectors with the best future prospects? What are the key industry sectors that we should target with a concerted effort?

I call on the Minister for State Development for support through his department in addressing these questions and, in cooperation with CREDC and Advance Cairns, to review our progress to date and also to formulate a diversification action plan for the years ahead. I have put this request in writing and I look forward to the minister's reply in due course.

Over the last 10 years there is no doubt that there have been significant and positive projects pointing the way to diversification; for example, in the expansion of education for overseas students in the Cairns area, in the expanding industry of repairs and refurbishments of superyachts from around the world, in the establishment on the Tablelands of the biotechnology company EcoBiotics, in the Craft Connect exposition by Cairns based artists that was a sell-out in Singapore.

More recently we have had announcements of projects with tremendous possibilities for the future. We have aviation maintenance training up and running in Cairns, with 20 apprenticeships commenced only weeks ago. We have had an announcement of an aviation skills centre to be built in Cairns. We heard at the end of last year of an application for accreditation by Cairns University Limited, a private university. Hopefully this process will be smooth and it will be only one to two years before the

private university will be up and running. I am a strong supporter of expansion in the marine industries and look to establishing a marine industries training centre.

There are many opportunities for Cairns, but it is important that our effort is targeted and well directed. I hope therefore that a review of diversification progress will give us pointers towards a sensible future, with many job prospects for the young people of Cairns.