



Speech by

DESLEY BOYLE

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

Hansard 9 September 2003

MARINE PARKS AMENDMENT BILL

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (3.13 p.m.): What equivocation from the other side of the House! The bottom line is that the opposition supports the bill. What we as a government are doing is what we should do. That is the proper way forward. I am pleased to have the support of the opposition. It can bellyache all it likes, but the bottom line is that what we are doing is the right thing to do in the circumstances. Over the decades Cairns has been through various periods of rapid growth. There is a phrase we use in Cairns to describe the kind of development we like—that is, balanced development. That is at the heart of the bill that is before us today. Cairns people have never been in a rush to grab the dollars from southern or even foreign investors in exchange for harm to the natural environment, to the beauty of the place or to the lifestyle that is essential to all of us who live in Cairns and that area. We have never been bought by money.

In the last big rush of development, which was in the late 1980s and 1990s, I had the privilege of being an elected member of the Cairns City Council. I was well aware of the pressures of development upon the council and state agencies at the time and of the depth of feeling that existed in the community about the kinds of development that should be approved and about the conditions that should be placed upon approved developments, particularly so far as potential risk to the environment was concerned. That is what Cairns people wanted in 1988 and the years immediately after. Now in 2003, as it seems that Cairns is moving again into a high-growth period—into what might be a boom period—we have the same tension as we previously faced.

Yes, there are those who have stronger and more extreme positions on development issues, and they express them clearly in Cairns—that is how it should be—but the majority of people line up in a sensible position in the middle. This is not an approval of a development with a rush job. It is not an overriding by the state government of the development processes normally under the control of the council. This is not any favour for money. This is not that circumstance at all. This is not a development we are approving without proper community consultation. Neither is it a development we are approving without very close and detailed consideration of not only the broader project but also the details and, most particularly, the impacts of the proposal on the environment.

The most difficult part of the development in terms of ensuring environmental sustainability is the dredging that is necessary to create the channel that will make it a canal estate. Over many years people with various views were able to express those views clearly and have them properly examined. What has occurred, however, is a confusion—previous approvals that were in place, difficulties with financial resourcing for the developer to go ahead with the project and then new legislation that moved the goalposts. It is reasonable and right for the House to resolve the confusion that has arisen over time and it is reasonable and right, as the opposition agrees, that that resolution allows this development to proceed.

I as much as anyone in Cairns am strongly committed to the beauty of the place—to the very precious environment that not only is precious in itself but also underlies, of course, the tourism appeal and the livability of Cairns. I also embrace the importance of the health of our waterways and of the coastal waters adjacent to this development and fronting the Great Barrier Reef. At the same time, I recognise that development wisely undertaken is of benefit. It creates jobs and possibilities. It increases tourism. It leads us into a period of modernity and prosperity that we like in Cairns and that is right and appropriate for us to have.

In order for that development to occur it is important, I recognise, for those companies brave enough to put projects on the table to have as much certainty as can reasonably be created. It takes very many dollars—in cases like this very many millions of dollars—to take a project from its original concept through all of the stages of approvals to that point where the development can actually go ahead. Along the way of course there are those with particular interests—particularly the environmental movement, which is going to set the highest standards possible and cause that concept and that project as it is developed to reach the standards set by the environmental movement. All of that happened in this case but, despite those stringent questions raised about the standards and about the suitability of canal development, in the end the approvals were given. That is the reason it is important now that we take this action as a House to allow the development to proceed.

I would have to agree that those in the electorate of Cairns have a lesser understanding than those who are right in the heart of the development. We are aware—from the publicity, from the letters to the editor, from the protests and from some calls to my office—of its importance to a lot of people living in the area where the Bluewater development will occur. They had invested in that area on the basis that the development had approvals and was going to go ahead. That, too, should be taken into account. Many of these people are not what we would call developers but simply householders who had picked for themselves a good place to live on the basis of the plans that they saw were going ahead for that area.

There is no doubt that we are taking a sensible course, a balanced course, an appropriate course in terms of business and in terms of the future. There are, of course, those who are disappointed in our action. There are certainly those in the environmental movement who have always maintained from before the development got its approvals, and still do maintain, that canal developments should not go ahead and this particular one should not, and I am sure that they will maintain their views. There are some others who do not like that there was some confusion on the part of the Beattie government on this matter and believe we should not be taking the action that we are today. I know that the Premier, the local member and others in this government concerned with this action have considered their views, but in the end we believe we are taking action on behalf of the majority and in proper consideration of the history of this matter.

I would like to address the unreasonableness of much of the publicity and the lobbying that was undertaken during the period of conflict some months ago towards the member for Barron River. We have a fine tradition in this state and in this country of arguing powerfully, verbally and democratically in proper language and out in the open for the views that we hold. There are, however, some lines that are not commonly crossed when we find that our views do have opposition. There were some tasteless and tawdry ways of campaigning against the member for Barron River, Lesley Clark. She did not deserve that, and it reflects on the people who undertook those unpleasant actions.

It was a very hard time for the member for Barron River. She behaved with tremendous style, as those of us who know her well would expect her to do. She at all times was open to those who supported the positions that she was taking as well as those who opposed them. She attended public meetings, including meetings at which she knew there would be angry crowds who at some moments might not be rational or reasonable. She faced a media barrage that was definitely at times biased and in that sense unreasonable, and she did all of this with her usual hard work and with dignity. I must say that it must have taken, on some occasions, some courage.

She represented the Beattie government with style, and I thank her for that. We should all thank her for that. Not only has she found a way forward within her electorate for this project; she has led the sensible legislation that is before us today—legislation which I commend to the House.