



Speech by

Hon. JUDY SPENCE

MEMBER FOR MOUNT GRAVATT

Hansard 30 October 2003

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Palm Island Aboriginal Council

Hon. J. C. SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Families and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Disability Services and Minister for Seniors) (10.11 a.m.): The Palm Island Aboriginal Council was dissolved by ratification of a regulation in this House two weeks ago. Mr Bill Buckby, an insolvency expert from Ernst and Young Townsville, was appointed as administrator on that same day, 16 October. Mr Buckby met with members of the Palm Island council the following day and has received support and cooperation. Community meetings are expected to continue on a regular basis and a monthly newsletter will be published by the administrator to ensure that the people of Palm Island are kept fully informed of his steps towards improving the financial position of the local Aboriginal council.

The administrator has commenced a full and detailed financial analysis of the council, including bank reconciliation and aged creditor and debtor listings. But he is faced with a number of difficulties in ascertaining the exact state of the council's financial affairs. Some of the many tasks yet to be undertaken by the administrator include reviewing the council's ongoing wages commitment, ascertaining whether the canteen can be reopened as a viable operation to reduce sly grogging on the island, and recruitment of suitably qualified staff into senior council positions.

The council's proposal to sell two items of heavy equipment in excellent condition has been withdrawn, given that their replacement value would be around half a million dollars but it is likely they would have fetched at least \$200,000 less than that at auction. In addition, problems have been identified in relation to sewage treatment and other items of critical community infrastructure. Mr Buckby is also addressing these issues as a matter of urgency and yesterday arranged for contractors to urgently repair damaged lining on a sewage settlement tank that has required attention for some months.

I understand that this has been a difficult time for the people of Palm Island. I am also appreciative of the high level of support Mr Buckby has received from community members and former councillors. I have said before that the dissolution of the Palm Island Aboriginal Council was a sad day. However, the government's decision has been well received and I look forward, as do the people of Palm Island, to the benefits that a financially stronger and more accountable council will bring.