



Speech by

**Dr LESLEY CLARK**

**MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER**

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Hansard 27 May 2003

#### **FISHING AND TOURISM INDUSTRIES, FAR-NORTH QUEENSLAND**

**Dr LESLEY CLARK** (Barron River—ALP) (12.04 p.m.): I would like to take this opportunity to draw to the attention of the House the impact of the SARS virus outbreak on two key industries in far-north Queensland: our tourism and live fish export industries. In April, international visitor arrivals were down 37 per cent compared to the number of arrivals last year, which equates to some 2,000 missing international tourists a week, primarily from Asia. Tropical Tourism North Queensland CEO Bill Calderwood has estimated that far-north Queensland tourism businesses can expect to see an average drop of 25 per cent this season due to the impact of the war in Iraq and the SARS health crisis. These impacts could translate into a cut of up to \$100 million from the far-north Queensland economy and put up to 5,000 jobs in jeopardy.

But we are hoping that we have experienced the worst. The good news is that domestic tourism is up seven per cent following the major promotional campaign in Australia and New Zealand by the state and federal governments. Also, a survey reported in the *Cairns Post* today indicated that, within Australia, Cairns is No. 1 on the travel wish list of Japan's 130 million people, which is a testament to the great work that the TTNQ has done over many years. Of course, we still have to convince them to get on a plane and come here. We will continue these efforts, as will the state and federal governments.

Yesterday, the managing director of the Australian Tourism Commission, Ken Boundy, said that the commission had already begun rolling out campaigns in Japan, Ireland, the US and the UK, where consumer confidence is growing. Today in the House, Tourism Minister Merri Rose informed honourable members that we have just launched tourism recovery operations in our key overseas markets which should act as a catalyst for travellers to return to Queensland.

While the industry continues to seek additional government support, the inaugural Tropical Tourism North Queensland regional conference yesterday focused on finding opportunities from the current crisis. As Bill Calderwood stated—

It is imperative that we now gather our resources and move on with strategic and flexible marketing in our domestic and international markets. The conference will examine the management of risk and how we as a region have and will respond to the current situation.

Tourism Queensland boss David Geshwind also had a very important message for the conference delegates, namely, the need to learn to become better risk managers because the tourism industry needs to recognise the fickle, vulnerable nature of the market.

Since 1989 in Cairns we have experienced the pilots' strike, Iraq War I, the Asian economic crisis, September 11, the Ansett collapse, Iraq War II and now SARS. As much as we would hope, there is probably no such thing as a normal year in the tourism industry anymore, and workshops are proposed for tourism operators to help them become better risk managers. The state government's recently released tourism crisis management plan will enable Queensland to respond more rapidly and effectively to industry shocks, which can be anything from natural disasters to terrorist attacks or airline collapses.

The tourism industry is not the only one to be a victim of the SARS crisis in Asia. The live seafood export industry is really struggling. About \$3 million to \$4 million worth of fin fish a month is

usually exported from Cairns, with 95 per cent of it going to Asian destinations, with Hong Kong by far the biggest buyer of all. Over the past eight weeks, demand has suddenly dropped to almost nothing with the widespread closure in Hong Kong and other Asian markets of restaurants and bars in response to the presence of the deadly SARS virus.

This is undoubtedly the worst crisis to hit the local fishing industry ever. Whilst the effect of SARS is showing some improvement, the industry estimates that it will take the state's fin fish fishery much more than a year to recover completely. Given that the seafood industry is the Cairns area's third largest industry and Cairns has the largest fishing fleet in Australia, the region is being particularly hard hit.

Ecofish, the seafood and marine industry cluster in far-north Queensland, is seeking an opportunity to meet with the Premier and Primary Industries Minister Henry Palaszczuk during the next two weeks to update them on the current situation in relation to SARS and to seek the government's support in assisting the industry to access exceptional circumstances assistance from the federal government. The fishing industry has never before accessed this scheme, but I believe that it has a very strong case. I hope that it will be possible to fit such a meeting into the Premier's busy schedule, because it is a very serious situation.

Fishers also want to discuss the possible deferral of the implementation of quotas planned as part of the coral reef fin fish management plan that is expected to be enacted from July this year by the Queensland Fisheries Service. Line fishers are seriously concerned that, with the fishing effort already severely reduced this year due to the SARS-initiated Asian market losses to which I have referred, new quotas starting in July will mean further reductions in their already very low or nonexistent incomes. I hope that this request will be given favourable consideration.

Our region and these industries have proven resilient after past crises and will no doubt bounce back again in the future. But the government has a role to play at this time and I urge our Premier and ministers to provide support, in partnership with the industry, to assist them to work through this difficult time.