



Speech by

**Dr LESLEY CLARK**

**MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER**

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Hansard 25 November 2003

### **GROWTH, FAR-NORTH QUEENSLAND**

**Dr LESLEY CLARK** (Barron River—ALP) (11.41 a.m.): It is estimated that there will be some 3.6 million people living in the corridor between the Sunshine Coast and the Gold Coast by the year 2027. The Premier has indicated that he is considering creating a ministry devoted entirely to managing growth if the government is returned. But far-north Queensland is also growing fast with a population of 320,000 anticipated by 2026, which represents an additional 96,000 people, and all the evidence suggests that Cairns is entering another particularly rapid growth period. When far-north Queensland last experienced a population boom in the late 1980s and early 1990s, I successfully lobbied the then Local Government Minister, Tom Burns, to develop FNQ 2010, a regional plan which has provided a vision and strategic plan to manage growth. But now is the time in my opinion to review the FNQ 2010 regional plan and begin work on FNQ 2025 to meet the needs of our growing population over the next 20 or so years, with a regional water supply strategy at the top of the list of my planning priorities.

The current drought in far-north Queensland with Lake Tinaroo and Copperlode Dam at near-record levels has focused the minds of the community on the question of future water supplies and there have been persistent calls by mayors Kevin Byrne and Mick Borzi, the Cairns Chamber of Commerce and irrigators for the government to commit now to detailed planning to construct another dam for the agricultural industries on the tableland. The Cairns City Council has lent its support for another dam for irrigators because it is planning an \$80 million water infrastructure program to extract and treat water from the Barron River at Kamerunga. The council would ultimately like to take approximately 55,000 megalitres of water a year, which is 150 million litres a day, from the Barron, the equivalent of one and a half times the water available from Copperlode Dam which can yield some 31,000 megalitres and more than double its current water use from Copperlode Dam and Behana Creek combined, which currently stands at 24,500 megalitres.

According to the council, this would provide for the city's needs for at least the next 50 years. However, this would clearly have implications for water supply for the irrigators who rely on the Barron River water stored in Lake Tinaroo. The Barron River water resource plan has a 10-year planning horizon to 2012, and as well as providing for irrigators it has made provision for an additional 4,000 million litres of water a year for Cairns City Council as requested by it during consultation. This represents an additional 15 per cent more water available for ratepayers, some of which may be required within the next six to eight years according to Cairns Water. The water resource plan also requires that council makes best use of its existing water supply, and Cairns Water has just commissioned a \$75,000 least cost planning study to determine the most cost-effective means of providing the water services that people need considering demand and supply options through to the year 2040. This was an outcome of a water forum that I organised earlier this year and the EPA, which has provided a \$25,000 subsidy towards the study, will work closely with council and consultant, and I look forward to its completion by mid-next year.

While the water resource plan did not recommend construction of Nullinga dam, it did provide a trigger so that planning could be brought forward if demand for water significantly increases beyond expected levels. However, it is clear to me that the debate about Nullinga dam will not go away until a long-term major detailed regional water supply strategy is developed for far-north Queensland, and I have written to the Premier seeking his support. The Cairns Water least cost planning study is an

important step in developing such a regional strategy. The communities of Cairns and the tablelands need to have greater certainty about how their long-term water needs will be met.

While I have confidence in the government's water resource planning capabilities and neither Cairns residents nor the irrigators will ever be allowed to run out of water, I recognise that the current 10-year planning horizon of the Barron River water resource plan cannot deliver the long-term reassurances about water that the community is seeking. A 50-year regional water supply strategy modelled on those currently under way in south-east Queensland and central Queensland will indicate when Nullinga dam or other bulk water supply options will be required after all demand management strategies have been implemented to conserve and recycle water. It is time for a truce in the war of words about water. The development of such a strategy will, I hope, build community consensus about the way forward and resolve the current debate about the future of Nullinga dam.

In the little time I have available to me, I want to briefly outline what is happening in my electorate to address future growth predictions in the areas of education, power, transport and health. A discussion paper entitled 'Cairns 2010: Prep to Pathways' will be released shortly by the Education Minister, Anna Bligh, for consultation with school communities and other stakeholders that sets out a future strategy to deal with increasing student enrolments. The plan includes recommendations to extend Redlynch State School to create a middle school to year 9, redevelop the Smithfield precinct to include additional primary facilities and an expanded senior campus sited on the James Cook University campus to foster a stronger working relationship with the university. Planning for the \$350 million four-lane road linking Cairns to Kuranda is well under way. Construction will be carried out over a 10- to 15-year period and will be the biggest transport project ever undertaken in the Cairns region. The Cairns integrated transport study was released for consultation in May this year and provided strategies out to the year 2036 and included a bus based mass transit technology with dedicated bus lanes on key corridors such as the Captain Cook Highway. The power supply to the Marlin Coast will be upgraded—

Time expired.