



Speech by

**Dr LESLEY CLARK**

**MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER**

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### **CAIRNS, HILLSLOPES**

**Dr LESLEY CLARK** (Barron River—ALP) (12.10 p.m.): Everyone who has visited Cairns city will tell people what makes it so special. It is not the five-star hotels and restaurants—good as they are; it is not the rich ecology of the wetlands at its doorstep; it is not the friendly, laid-back atmosphere; it is not even the new \$12 million esplanade swimming lagoon enjoyed by tourists and locals alike. No, it is the stunningly beautiful rainforest covered mountain backdrop. This is the lasting memory that visitors take home, which locals are privileged to enjoy every day and which makes living in Cairns so very special.

There have been many environmental battles that have divided and continue to divide the Cairns community. I should know, because I have been involved in every one of them. But the issue that most unites the people of Cairns is the desire to retain their magnificent mountain backdrop, known locally—in a wonderfully understated way—as the Cairns hillslopes or, more recently, as the Cairns scenic rim. The two major threats to the physical, visual and ecological integrity of the Cairns hillslopes have always been fire and inappropriate development. I am passionate about their protection and I have contributed to this goal for over 20 years, first as a conservationist serving on the Cairns council hillslopes committee, then as a Mulgrave shire councillor and then as the member for Barron River. During that time there have been two community groups established especially to fight for the protection of the Cairns hillslopes: the Cairns Hillslopes and Rainforest Protection Society and, more recently, the Save Our Slopes Community Action Group.

In 1995 I put forward a 12-point action plan to protect the hillslopes. Over the past 20 years we have had some successes in the form of improved fire management, the revegetation of some denuded hillslopes, the creation of the 270-hectare Smithfield Conservation Park, which forms the mountain backdrop to the JCU, the acquisition of land at Brinsmead to add to the Mount Whitfield Conservation Park, additional planning control on development on steep and unstable slopes, and constraints on building styles and colours of homes. But this is not enough. Despite the recession in Cairns over the past seven to eight years, more houses are steadily being approved, climbing even higher up the hillslopes. The city is now experiencing a second boom and this sought-after freehold land is once again under intense pressure from development and once again the community is calling for action.

The Cairns City Council and the state government have the power to put an end to inappropriate development and protect key areas for all time. They must exercise that power before it is too late. Limiting residential development on the Cairns hillslopes, the green face of Cairns, will bring economic, social and environmental benefits to the whole community. It can be achieved through the introduction of additional controls in the draft Cairns plan that is being prepared under the Integrated Planning Act and by the acquisition of key blocks of land for inclusion in the Barron Gorge National Park or the Mount Whitfield Conservation Park.

The SOS Community Action Group provided a detailed, comprehensive submission to the Cairns City Council outlining the changes that are needed to the draft Cairns plan if it is to adequately protect the hillslopes from inappropriate development. I support their contention that the Cairns plan 'gives ammunition to relentless advocates of urban development of the hillslopes and does not empower administrators to resist.' Central to the SOS submission is the extension of the conservation designation to additional key parcels of hillslopes land as well as changes to land use boundaries, desired environmental outcomes, development codes and performance indicators to the plan as they relate to hillslopes development. I call on the Cairns City Council to adopt all the recommendations in

the SOS submission and urge officers from the Department of Local Government to work with the council to achieve this goal, because there are key state interests involved.

The suburbs of Aeroglen, Stratford, Freshwater, Brinsmead, Whitfield and Edge Hill encircle Mount Whitfield and development spreads up its slopes to meet the conservation park. There are key blocks in these suburbs that should be designated as conservation in the plan or acquired and added to the conservation park. One such block is that owned by South Australian developer Joe Emanuel, which has the only 360-degree views of the coast and hinterland available anywhere in Cairns and which should belong to the people of Cairns, not just those few rich enough to enjoy it. There are other hillside blocks in my Barron River electorate—at Redlynch and on the Marlin Coast—that are also inappropriate for development.

This year is absolutely critical for the future of the Cairns hillslopes and I believe that a coalition of organisations, individuals and businesses is needed to work together with the SOS Community Action Group to ensure that future generations can continue to be inspired and awed by the stunning beauty of the rainforest backdrop to Cairns. I am committed to doing everything in my power to achieve that goal and I look forward to continuing to work with the many people who share my vision for the protection of the Cairns scenic rim.