



Speech by
Lesley Clark

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

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NORTH QUEENSLAND COOPERATIVE RESEARCH CENTRES

Dr LESLEY CLARK (Barron River—ALP) (7.10 p.m.): Some two weeks ago the Federal government dropped a bombshell on north Queensland with the announcement that it would cease funding the Rainforest Cooperative Research Centre in Cairns and the Reef Cooperative Research Centre in Townsville after 2006. This decision has generated community outrage in both Cairns and Townsville. Key members of the conservation movement, the scientific community and the tourism industry have condemned this decision as woefully short-sighted. I join with the Premier and Environment Minister John Mickel in calling on the federal government to reverse this devastating blow to tropical science, the environment and the tourism industry.

The failure of the federal member for Leichhardt to stand up for the Rainforest CRC is deeply disappointing. Unlike Peter Lindsay, his federal colleague in Townsville, Warren Entsch appears to have kowtowed to his party on this vital issue and resorted to attacking the *Cairns Post* when it accurately reported the funding cuts.

So why did these CRCs fail to get refunded? Was it because of the quality of their research? No! It was because the federal government removed the criteria of public good which was previously included in the guidelines for assessing funding applications and focused instead entirely on commercial considerations.

If any members here have any doubt about the value of these institutions then I suggest that they visit their web sites or read their annual reports which describe the research they have undertaken. Since its inception over the last 10 years, the Rainforest CRC has built a national and international reputation for its applied rainforest research and is ranked among the top three rainforest research institutions of its kind. It has provided novel research that has led to real outcomes on issues such as rainforest tourism management, environmental weeds, feral pigs and the impact of climate change on our region. I commend CEO Nigel Stork, his deputy Steve Turton and all the CRC researchers for their excellent work.

This week, on behalf of the Premier, I delivered an opening address to a conference in Cairns to progress the international Hilltops to Oceans Partnership Initiative H₂O that was launched in 2002 at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. The conference was focused on policies and strategies to reduce water pollution from land based activities, which is a worldwide problem. As I indicated in my address, research from both the rainforest and reef CRCs underpins the government's Reef Protection Water Quality Plan which is addressing this vital issue.

The federal government was represented at the conference and has a responsibility to support the United Nations Environment Program in the implementation of the global program of action for the protection of the marine environment from land based activities, which includes the H₂O initiative. This initiative is also consistent with article 207 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, to which Australia is a signatory. I hope that the leaders of the international community attending the conference will urge the federal government to honour its commitments to the UN and support global action to protect our oceans and reefs and, in doing so, continue to fund both the Rainforest and Reef CRCs whose research contributes to this vitally important goal.

In the meantime, the Beattie government will proceed with a range of reef related projects worth in excess of \$50 million because, unlike the federal government, we are totally committed to the protection of this international icon.