



Speech by
Lesley Clark

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

Hansard Wednesday, 19 May 2004

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Dr LESLEY CLARK (Barron River—ALP) (3.40 p.m.): It is with pleasure that I rise to contribute to the address-in-reply debate as it marks the appointment of a second female governor, Dr Quentin Bryce, to whom I send my best wishes, and the beginning of the 51st Parliament. It also marks the beginning of my fifth term representing the people of Barron River. I thank them for the continuing faith they put in me to represent their interests in this place. I am humbled by their support and commit myself to another three years of hard work on their behalf.

The success of the 2004 campaign to retain Barron River is due to the hard work of many people. I am under no illusions about the significance of the leadership of the Premier and our winning campaign. I congratulate him on his achievements and for the health, education and environment policies in particular that were supported by the people of Queensland at the election, resulting in the return of 63 Labor members. I congratulate all new members, particularly the new member for Cook, Jason O'Brien, with whom I share a boundary. He will be another great member for Cook, following in the footsteps of Bob Scott and Steve Bredhauer.

At the local level, I thank my campaign team, headed by Jim Turnour, for their commitment and hard work. The Liberals and the Greens made sure it was one of the toughest campaigns I have experienced so the final result of 53 per cent of the vote was an excellent outcome for this marginal seat. Jim Turnour is now the Labor candidate for the federal seat of Leichhardt and has all the qualities necessary to make an excellent federal member. I wish him well in his contest against sitting member Warren Entsch, whose colourful stunts, like riding a mower across Cape York Peninsula, cannot disguise the fact that he has not delivered for the industries in far-north Queensland. His opposition to increased environmental protection for the cape and the Daintree forest is well known, as is his support for the sale of Telstra despite continuing shortcomings in telecommunication services in far-north Queensland.

I am also indebted to the many ALP supporters and members in Barron River who did everything, as always from letterboxing and enveloping to fundraising. I want to particularly thank my electorate staff, Cathy Lovern and Jess Paoluci, who served on the campaign committee and who also provide such excellent service to my constituents in the electorate office. For Jess, who just started working me this year, it was her first campaign. The election was called on her 24th birthday so it will be a campaign she will never forget. I also appreciate the great support we received from party office, particularly Melissa Thomas, who was always available and went into action no matter how stressed.

Finally, I want to thank my family, in particular my husband, Ross, whose love continues to sustain me in the demanding and stressful role as member for Barron River, to say nothing of the range of household tasks that he uncomplainingly performs making me the envy of all my friends. My daughter, Jen, flew home to provide her support on election day, which made all the difference to me. The last time she was personally involved on election day was the horrendous 1995 election loss. So it was great to enjoy the victory party together. Sadly, my son was on Army exercises and not able to get leave but his support has always been there for mum, and I thank David for that. I am indeed fortunate to have such a wonderful supportive family—an absolute necessity for a career in politics, as we all know.

After the election I reviewed the history of my marginal seat. A few members of this House will remember my National Party predecessor, Martin Tenni, who won the seat from the Labor Party's Bill Wood in 1974 by a handful of votes and who served until 1989. I have now matched Martin Tenni's record, winning Barron River for five terms. In fact, my result in 2001 when I achieved 57 per cent the vote was the largest majority achieved by any member in the history of the seat since it was created in 1971. Labor and conservative parties have each held the seat of Barron River for six terms each, demonstrating the inherent marginal nature of this seat. Since 1992, the votes of Green party supporters have played an important role in Barron River, with Labor consistently receiving about 65 per cent of their preferences. I particularly appreciate their support in the last election.

There have been significant improvements in services in the Barron River since I was first elected in 1989, with major achievements including the construction of the western bypass, establishment of the Smithfield Community Health Centre, Kuranda High School and Kuranda Ambulance Station, extension to the Smithfield Police Station and police beats in Trinity Beach and Holloways Beach, and significant funding contributions to the development of the Cairns campus of JCU. The unique environment has been protected and enhanced with the gazettal of the Marlin Coast State Marine Park, Smithfield Conservation Park and additional visitor facilities in the Barron Gorge National Park.

Education has always been a priority for me in light of my own professional background and last term nearly \$6 million was allocated to my schools for new facilities, upgrades, computers and airconditioning. Planning has begun to determine the location and timing for new schools to cater for increased enrolments associated with the population growth occurring in the Cairns area and my electorate.

But I know there is always more to be done and I am pleased to have gained election commitments for a number of significant projects in Barron River, some of which have already been delivered while others will be funded in the forthcoming budget. For example, as I told the House in the last sittings, a \$200,000 house has already been purchased for the Kuranda Neighbourhood Centre. Work should start later this year on the \$3 million bridge over Rice's Gully to ensure a flood-free access for local Redlynch residents. Schools at Redlynch will also benefit with extensions to the administration centre and library at the state school and funds for St Andrews Catholic College to enable them to construct facilities to offer middle schooling next year. The Redlynch Valley community is indeed fortunate to have two excellent schools offering a choice for parents. I commend principals Richard Ruddell and Loretta Graham and their staff for their dedication and achievements. Edge Hill State School and Smithfield High School have been allocated funding for major projects under the Smart Schools Renewal Program.

There will be another police beat at Yorkeys Knob to ensure that the crime rates remain at the current low levels on the Marlin Coast. I would like to thank Senior Sergeant Tim Nolan and his team at the Smithfield Police Station for their excellent work. Boaters on the Marlin Coast have welcomed the announcement that the boat ramps at both Yorkeys Knob and Stratford will be widened to three lanes, making for quicker entry and exit at these busy ramps.

Roads have not been forgotten and further improvements will be made to increase safety at the roundabouts on the Captain Cook Highway. I use this opportunity to beg motorists to slow down on these roundabouts because speed is still the most significant contributing factor to these accidents. I have long campaigned for improvements to bus services for the residents of Caravonica and Lake Placid in particular, so I am looking forward to new weekend services for these areas and other improvements after July with the injection of an extra \$3 million into public transport in Cairns which will subsidise four new buses and provide other improvements.

The problems with the Sunbus service reached crisis point last year when mechanical failures saw so many buses off the road that some services were cancelled and others run very late. There have been significant improvements since the appointment of a new manager and there is now a real commitment on the part of the company to meet their contractual obligations. Notwithstanding that, I welcome the action by the Transport Minister that Sunbus has been served with a section 100 notice which means that if any beaches are found over the next three years the company can be fined a maximum of \$12,000 per breach, underscoring our determination to ensure a high-quality public transport service for Cairns.

The largest road project in my electorate is proving the most controversial—namely, that of the proposed \$400 million four-lane widening of the Kuranda Range road which is opposed by a Kuranda community action group. This is a complex issue and I will speak about it at length in this House at another time when environmental assessment is further progressed. Suffice it to say that views in the community are strongly divided about the costs and benefits of this project.

Public housing has always been a controversial issue in Barron River—or at least its location. But the current two projects have been well received. The \$4 million redevelopment of the Aboriginal community of Top Kowrova began last year and the first three houses are nearing completion. The remaining nine will be constructed over the next two years and will be accompanied by upgrades in

sewerage, road and water infrastructure. Seniors will also benefit from the construction of eight two-bedroom units in Oyster Court, Trinity Beach in 2005-06.

Whilst not in the Barron River electorate, Cairns Base Hospital, as the major regional hospital, is critical to my constituents. The Liberals' campaign in both Barron River and Cairns targeted the hospital, aided and abetted by the *Cairns Post*. One feature article, highly critical of the government and health services, which appeared during the campaign actually used the journalist's sister and her family who I believe have connections to the Liberal Party.

The candidate who contested Barron River in 2001, Councillor Sno Bonneau, headed up a group calling itself the Cairns Health Interest Group, which was in fact blatantly political and used very cleverly by the Liberal Party for its own advantage. I am not denying that there is a need for improvement in services at the hospital, but the community never received a balanced picture about what was happening at the hospital and the excellent work of the staff. I would like to particularly commend Phil Cammish, the regional manager for the Cairns health district, whose appointment last year has proved to be a turning point for the hospital. The government's commitments for a resident ear, nose and throat surgeon and increased intensive care capacity are being implemented and the hospital will, for the first time ever, have its own full-time cardiac specialist shortly.

The hospital has also taken advantage of the funding from the first \$20 million made available to reduce waiting lists for elective surgery, another of the government's election commitments. The election commitments I have described and which will be implemented over the next three years represent my success at campaigning for the facilities and services that are needed for my electorate, but I have another list of projects that will shape my efforts over the next three years.

I may not succeed in delivering them all because they are not all issues over which the state government has complete control, but they are issues that the Barron River community has put on the agenda, and I am committed to working with them. The responsible ministers are all aware of these issues and of my determination to achieve positive results for my community as far as possible. The first of these is the provision of new secondary facilities to cope with the growth in Cairns which has, in the last year, moved from the southern corridor to the west and north into Barron River. The Minister for Education is giving consideration to a community consultation process to progress this issue. I have spoken about this issue in the House previously and indicated my personal support for additional secondary facilities either at Redlynch or on the Marlin Coast.

One option to be canvassed is a senior campus for years 10, 11 and 12 on the JCU campus. However, I want to hear what the school communities and the university have to say about this proposal. I have had informal discussions with the Vice-Chancellor Bernard Moulden and understand that he is yet to be convinced of the benefits for the university from such an arrangement, so this is clearly something that needs to be explored in the coming months. Another education project that I am pursuing is related to road safety around the Smithfield State School and the Holy Cross Primary School. The SafeST plan for the high school has identified the need for internal staff parking, and I have begun making representations to the minister on this issue.

The Kuranda community is united in its aspirations for a swimming pool, and I have pledged my support for this project. The Mareeba Shire Council has been reluctant to commit to this project for many years because of its costs. However, the last local government election resulted in a commitment to carry out a feasibility study, which is now well under way. I am hoping that the council will apply to the state government for funding under our major regional facilities program this year. The independent candidate at the last state election, Andrew Ryan, has publicly indicated that the swimming pool is on the Prime Minister's wish list. I do hope that this is true, because the forthcoming federal election is the time to take the Kuranda pool off his wish list and add it to his want list and include it in the federal government's election commitments to far-north Queensland with the appropriate encouragement of the federal member, Warren Entsch.

I have already indicated that the Department of Housing is constructing 12 new houses at one of the Aboriginal communities in Kuranda, but the local Aboriginal housing co-op has just completed a report which indicates that another 30 homes are needed to address the housing needs of indigenous people in the Kuranda district. I will continue to work with Ngnoombi co-op, and the department is currently considering the purchase of three blocks of land near Kowrowa. But again the federal government needs to play its part, and with the demise of ATSIC and its housing program I am waiting to see if the federal government department now responsible for housing will meet its obligations to the Kuranda indigenous community.

There is considerable cultural diversity in the Cairns region and in my electorate, and I have begun working with the Cairns City Council on two projects to support that diversity. The government has two parcels of land in the Kamerunga area near the Barron River which the government is prepared to convert to a reserve for historical, cultural and heritage purposes. I have requested that the council become the trustee for this land so that the Cairns District Chinese Association can develop its proposal for a major

cultural heritage centre and the Boddicitta Buddhist Centre can lease existing buildings for its activities, including regular retreats. I am progressing that project with the council and look forward to having a meeting shortly about that.

The Barron River electorate is amongst the most scenic in the state, and environmental issues will continue to be important to me and to my constituents. I have already spoken in this House about the significance of the forested backdrop to Cairns and the important role that the Cairns City Council new planning scheme will play in protecting the hillslopes from inappropriate development. I am supporting the actions of the Save Our Slopes Community Action Group and the Cairns and Far North Environment Centre and will work with them as well as the council and the Minister for the Environment and the Minister for Local Government to achieve the best possible outcome.

One of the projects I initiated back in 1995 was the establishment of the Smithfield Conservation Park, which was finally gazetted in 1999. Part of the park serves as a centre for mountain biking activity, and I commend the Cairns Mountain Bike Club for its commitment to develop the young riders from our area who have gone on to international success. However, there are community access problems that I am working to resolve with the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and the James Cook University, whose land adjoins the park. I have also requested additional capital works funding to create parking facilities and a signed walking track system to enhance the recreational use of the park for locals.

The new development boom in Cairns and the Marlin Coast in particular is putting increased pressure on the coastal environment, as well as the hillslopes. The recently released Wet Tropics Regional Coastal Management Plan and amendments to the Vegetation Management Act will provide additional protection, but again the new Cairns plan will determine the future of this area in large measure. In my submission to the plan, I sought additional protection for the coastal creeks that act as wildlife corridors.

Members will recall the personal heartache I experienced last year regarding the Bluewater canal development. Due to the existence of prior approvals, I had no option but to seek the intervention of the Premier and support legislation to allow the development to proceed despite the impact of the development on the State Marine Park. This development has proved to be less than benign, at least in the construction phase, with displaced wallabies being killed on adjoining roads, soil erosion problems and delays in finalising the acid sulfate management plan. I am also very disappointed with the delays in allocating \$50,000 to environmental groups as required under the deed of agreement that exists with Consolidated Properties. There are now reports in the media that the property is up for sale for \$40 million. The company gained the support of the community on the basis of a commitment to bring many benefits for local residents in Trinity Park, and I will be monitoring the situation very closely to ensure that it delivers for locals, for those who invested in this development, and that all the detailed and comprehensive environmental conditions in the deed are fully complied with—sale or no sale.

In the parliament I am looking forward to my new role as chair of the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee which is currently giving consideration to the question of a preamble to the Queensland Constitution. I want to take this opportunity to thank my staff when I was parliamentary secretary to the Premier in far-north Queensland during the last term of government. Kylie Bock and Des Lee were both wonderful in their support and skills that they brought to their respective roles as policy adviser and administrative assistant. We worked very closely with government departments and business and community organisations to enhance services to far-north Queensland, but I am particularly proud of our work in the area of women in emerging industries.

I was delighted to hear the new Minister for Women, Desley Boyle, today call for nominations for the Smart Women Smart State Awards which I initiated last year to recognise the achievements of women and girls in science, engineering and technology. We were a great team, and I am pleased that both Des and Kylie will be continuing to work for the government in Cairns so that their expertise will not be lost. I am also serving on the backbench committees of Ministers Bligh, Mickel, Robertson and Keech and I look forward to making a contribution to their portfolios, particularly as it relates to far-north Queensland. I also want to congratulate my colleagues the member for Cairns, Desley Boyle, and the member for Mulgrave, Warren Pitt, on their elevation to the ministry, and I look forward to working with them closely to bring further benefits to far-north Queensland. In conclusion, I want to thank again all those people who supported me and continue to support me in so many ways, enabling me to continue to represent the people of Barron River. To them I reiterate my determination to give of my utmost to represent their interests and to assist them to achieve their aspirations insofar as I am able.