



Speech by
Lesley Clark

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

Hansard Thursday, 19 August 2004

DEATH OF MR G. TRACEY

Dr LESLEY CLARK (Barron River—ALP) (6.12 p.m.): It is often said no-one is indispensable as a justification for unpalatable decisions or as a way of reminding us to keep our egos in check. But it is not true: we are all special and unique individuals and some of us have knowledge that is indeed indispensable not just for their own local circle but also for the world. One such person I have been privileged to know for some 20 years is rainforest ecologist Geoff Tracey whose funeral I attended in his home town of Yungaburra on 3 August. There was also no need to keep Geoff's ego in check because he was a very humble person, never happier than when he was sharing his vastly intimate knowledge of the rainforest he loved—a privilege I experienced many times, inspiring my own awe and love of our tropical forests.

Many of Geoff's friends joined his loving wife, Reinhild, and children, Bernard, Deiter and Karen, and the moving eulogy was given by another legendary figure of rainforest knowledge and conservation, his close friend of 40 years, Peter Stanton. Thank you, Peter, for reminding us all why Geoff was so loved and respected. Peter outlined Geoff's many achievements which were recognised with an Order of Australia honour in 1996. His most significant was undoubtedly his partnership with Professor Len Webb in the groundbreaking mapping of the tropical rainforest into its 15 different types and completely revising our understanding of the origin and nature of Australian rainforests. Their work for the federal government in drawing up the boundaries of the World Heritage listing of the north Queensland Wet Tropics forest was also invaluable.

Working in the rainforests was not just a job for Geoff; it was his passion. When he retired from the CSIRO in 1991, he became the driving force behind a number of tree planting programs including the shire based Wet Tropics tree planting scheme for displaced timberworkers and TREAT, Trees for the Evelyn and Atherton Tablelands—a voluntary organisation that has planted thousands of trees to help repair the environment and create rainforest wildlife corridors. Its cofounder Joan Wright is another person for whom Geoff was indispensable.

Geoff requested no flowers at the funeral but, rather, donations to the Australian Bush Heritage Fund, so I selected a spray of leaves from the rainforest trees in my own garden to lay on the coffin. I chose *Evodia*, the host tree for the *Ulysses* butterfly, that brings us beauty and signifies the ecological relationships that Geoff taught us to appreciate and *Omolanthus*, a rainforest pioneer species because his pioneering work with Professor Len Webb led ultimately to the protection of our tropical rainforest for all times. The world truly is indebted to Geoff Tracey. To Reinhild and Geoff's children, my thoughts are with you. While Geoff is gone, his spirit will be with you every time you walk in the rainforest he knew and loved so well.