



Speech by

Hon. LIDDY CLARK

MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

Hansard 20 April 2004

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Alcohol Management Plans

Hon. E. A. CLARK (Clayfield—ALP) (Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy) (10.07 a.m.): Last week the Queensland government introduced new alcohol management plans in seven remote communities, and I am proud to announce that this means alcohol management plans have now been introduced to 17 of the 19 communities at risk identified in Justice Tony Fitzgerald's 2001 Cape York Justice Study. The Beattie government understands the crisis these communities are in. This is why Justice Fitzgerald conducted a comprehensive study into the many problems the people of these communities face. His study found—

Current levels of alcohol consumption and alcohol-associated harm are extreme.

The study found death rates attributed to alcohol in the Cape York indigenous population were more than 21 times the general Queensland rate and homicide and violence rates were 18 times higher. The Beattie government could not stand by and see this continue.

As the Cape York Justice Study recommended, we have now made alcohol management plans our first priority. Early figures show that these plans, delivered in conjunction with the community justice groups, are making a significant difference, as the Premier told parliament last month. People who live and work in the communities have told us that their lives are improving. Gabriel Butcher and Greg Pascoe from the Wulpumu Community Justice Group have informed me that Lockhart River is a significantly better community since the plan was introduced. They said it is now a much quieter place, school attendances are up and the number of women and children seeking access to the women's shelter has decreased significantly, as has the number of people attending the health clinic for alcohol related reasons.

Don Anderson, Director of Western Cape College, says that the plans have delivered a better living environment that better prepares children to access education. Doctor Lara Wieland says that there is much more to be done, but she says a visit to one of the communities she lived in for three years showed a huge change. She tells of diehard drinking patients who have finally given up drinking. 'They told me they were happy,' she says, and that alcohol bans had made it easier for them to finally give up without being a social outcast because of it.

As Dr Wieland points out, this is only the first step. These restrictions are tough, but this is about more than the right to drink; it is about the rights of everyone—of men, women and children—to live longer and to live without fear of the disastrous effects of alcohol abuse.