



Speech by

Marc Rowell

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

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BREAKWATER ISLAND CASINO AGREEMENT AMENDMENT BILL

Mr ROWELL (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (4.46 pm): I rise in support of the cruise ship terminal. I think it is an extremely important initiative as far as Townsville and north Queensland are concerned. In many instances we are going to see people travelling further than just the Townsville region. Whether it be Charters Towers or further north, there are some amazing areas as far as tourist development is concerned. Generally we are very supportive of the concept of having the cruise ship terminal and have been for some time. It has been in the wings for a long time. I think is going to be extremely important to many people throughout the north to see this come into being.

Tourism has become a major initiative and is certainly very important to the economy of north Queensland. This other way of getting people into north Queensland is certainly going to take the pressure off the roads from the south. People are coming for a range of reasons. We have seen a lot of interest from the American navy. It has clearly demonstrated that it thinks Australia is a good, safe, secure place, and that is very important to the American navy. Whether the navy uses the terminal to the extent that it has talked about in the past remains to be seen. Naval officers who are on ships that are out to sea for some considerable time may bring families over and spend weeks on R&R leave, but that also remains to be seen. I know that the navy has brought some ships in. I think the capacity of the terminal will be extremely important. I know that some navy ships have had difficulty getting into the existing facilities and have had to anchor off the port itself. If we are going to build a cruise ship terminal, it is extremely important that we have a look at the limitations as far as the draft of those vessels is concerned and cater for those needs in the future.

It is amazing that we have not heard very much from the very strong environmental groups about this terminal. Very often when we do these types of developments they raise their concerns. In my part of the world where developments have tried to get a go, long periods of time have been spent by the developer putting forward plans. They have to satisfy certain elements of the EPA, the GBRMPA and so on, which appear at this time to be fairly onside as far as this development is concerned.

Considering that the EPA has been very strong as far as coastal management plans are concerned, I have not heard too much about what is involved with that process. Everywhere we go along the coast, particularly in north Queensland, the issue of coastal management raises its head. Whether it is for beach protection, whether it is for building harbours or whether it is for instigating tourism initiatives, the EPA has had a very strong and very vocal response.

We have also seen the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority weighing in with its requirements. I am not sure if the EIS has been undertaken at the present time, but the state and local governments will review the process. Well, that is great. We have a process well down the track, by the looks of it, and an EIS that is part and parcel of it, and the government is talking about \$15 million being put into it. There are issues concerning seagrass and dugongs. Dugongs are always an issue when these projects raise their head, particularly north of Townsville, but it is encouraging to see that somehow or another we have a contented EPA, a contented Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and it appears that the EIS will go ahead.

The Deputy Premier's decision will not be subject to third-party appeal rights, and the Judicial Review Act will not apply to certain decisions under the agreement. That is particularly interesting, and it has been raised by the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee that there are some concerns about this issue. It is a bit ironic because when Port Hinchinbrook tried to do some very similar things in initiating a great development there we had the greens come up from down south in bus loads. There was an issue concerning a lake development in Port Hinchinbrook, and it became almost impossible for that to go ahead. That is despite the fact that they were going to put a geotextile liner in a two-metre pond, and if the water got to the point where it was a problem there was going to be 100 millimetres of cement put on that geotextile liner which would have made it nearly impossible as far as impregnation of water was concerned. But, no, we could not go ahead with that project, even though they were going to have a sluice gate that would have opened that lake, and that water could have been drained in a matter of hours for any repair work that might have been required because of cracks or something of that nature. But that project was a nonevent as far as the EPA was concerned.

There are extreme difficulties in getting these projects up in places other than Townsville, it appears, because we have also had problems with beach erosion. When it came to beach erosion along the Strand and the difficulties faced there, it was not too hard for the government to put up \$15 million. The approval process was completed and the local authorities also had to add to it. We have very similar situations that have developed in the area north of Townsville, where people were prepared to put up money. We have resolution of a particular issue up there which is certainly an improvement on what was proposed in the earlier stages.

But I want to point out the principles involved in the process of getting these projects up and going. While it is good for one area and it is going to be beneficial—and we support it; there is no question about that—the approval process is about having numbers of people. I think there are some political issues involved, too. It is extremely disappointing that throughout north Queensland projects that could get up and running are being stymied by the environmental movement, which is very vocal. There are both GBRMPA and EPA issues that certainly throw cold water onto them, and initiatives that would be very important as far as jobs and opportunities in those areas are concerned go down the gurgler. People have to jump through a range of hoops and it is almost impossible to do it. While the Townsville Ocean Terminal is a good initiative, I hope in the future that when sensible proposals are put up right throughout north Queensland that would benefit the state of Queensland we get the requisite level of support without those people prepared to put up financing being given the run-around.

If we are not careful, investors who are prepared to spend money—and it is large amounts of money that are required—will not come back to north Queensland because they will simply say, 'It is too hard. It is too difficult. It is impossible to get through the approval process.' Yet when we see something happen in Townsville, the whole thing melts away to, 'There is no problem at all. We can do away with the appeal rights of third parties. We do not have to have a judicial review.' The process is pretty easy as long as there is a will to support the initiatives of the people prepared to put the money together and there are only minor compliance issues in comparison to what many people throughout other regions of north Queensland have to comply with.

With those few words, I certainly support the legislation as far as the ocean terminals are concerned for Townsville. I believe it will have flow-on effects right throughout the north in tourism prospects for the region, particularly in view of a range of initiatives, not just tourism, coming from the ocean vessels themselves that will go up and down the coast. Also, it will serve as a recreation area for the likes of the American navy and others in the future. Australia is seen to be a good, safe, stable country, and I have no doubt that this proposal has a lot going for it. In the future I believe other organisations will benefit from this terminal being put in place.