



Speech by

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KURANDA RANGE ROAD

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (8.17 pm): The long-awaited upgrade of the Kuranda Range Road, linking Cairns and the coast to the Atherton Tableland, has been delayed yet again. The Wet Tropics Management Authority has put its rezoning decision back a month. It might be only a month, but it is yet another delay in this vital road link to such a large area. It will be a massive project, with estimates of costs running at around \$500 million. With each delay, it will cost even more. Every hiccup at the beginning will stretch the entire process out longer.

I mention this because, yet again, the Kuranda Range Road has been closed due to wet weather. It was cut just a month ago by Cyclone Larry and in the last few days it has been cut yet again. It is not good enough.

This government has recognised the present and future needs by committing to the upgrade. However, the 10 years that it is expected to take is far too long. The existing road demonstrates year after year that it cannot cope with normal tropical weather. It also struggles to cope with growing traffic loads, increasing numbers of tourist buses and heavy transport which services the growing economy of the tablelands, the cape and the vast western regions.

I urge the government to remain committed to this project and I call on it to step up to the plate and fast-track this necessary project. There has already been a very long-running public consultation process. It has stretched out over many years of debate and consultation. It is reaching the stage of being beyond the ridiculous to see this project held up yet again for the sake of yet more public consultation.

The arguments are well established and are essentially quite clear. There are always those who will disagree with any change or anything that might possibly have any impact at all on the natural environment. There are those who believe a tunnel is the only real option and there are those who support the government's option of a major upgrade to the existing road. I shudder to think of this project falling foul of the same kind of endless legal challenges that have plagued other developments. As I have said, it has already been the focus of long public scrutiny, and it is past time to simply get on with the job and build it as quickly as is humanly possible.