



Speech by

Mark McArdle

MEMBER FOR CALOUNDRA

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QUEENSLAND AIR MUSEUM

Mr McARDLE (Caloundra—Lib) (12.12 pm): In 1973 the Queensland Air Museum had its beginning when the Queensland branch of the Aviation Historical Society of Australia purchased a Canberra bomber. The bomber was unveiled at the Pioneer Valley Park at Kuraby, thus inaugurating the museum. By 1977, this aircraft was moved to a site at lower Nudgee where it was joined by a number of other aircraft.

In 1980, the then Landsborough Shire Council, under Councillor John Harrison, persuaded the Landsborough Shire Council to allow the air museum to relocate to Caloundra and offered a hangar on the current Caloundra Aerodrome site. In 1986, a Canberra, Meteor and two Sea Venoms were transported to Caloundra. In April 1987, the museum was opened by Mrs Ly Bennett, the wife of the late Air Vice-Marshal Don Bennett, of Pathfinder fame, who had been patron until his death in September 1986. In fact, the road leading to the museum has been officially renamed Pathfinder Drive in honour of the Pathfinder force.

Over the ensuing years the museum purchased and restored a number of aircraft. There are now 40 in total. It has been explained to me that this is perhaps the second most important collection of aircraft in Queensland and one of the most important in Australia. The museum does not merely focus on military aircraft; rather it highlights aircraft in general with a particular emphasis on the history of flight in Queensland. In addition to aircraft, the museum houses a large quantity of memorabilia, including that of aviators such as Charles Kingsford Smith and Bert Hinkler. The museum is a voluntary organisation with about 160 members, many drawn from Air Force and aviation backgrounds. The museum sits on two hectares and attracts between 10,000 and 12,000 tourists per year. The Sunshine Coast draws enormous economic benefit from tourism and the museum is one element of that industry.

We now find that the growth in Caloundra poses a real threat to the museum as it sits on the Caloundra Aerodrome site, which is a prime location for development and the CAMCOS rail corridor. The members of the air museum and the people of Caloundra understand very clearly the importance of development and growth, but equally they are concerned that the historical value of these aircraft and memorabilia be not lost to the Sunshine Coast, given the hundreds of thousands of hours over the past 20-odd years that have been put into the museum.

It is also a simple fact that the aircraft cannot be moved. I was advised that it would take 20 men up to two years to dismantle and move the 40-odd aircraft and memorabilia that are on the site. This museum is a vital link to our aviation history and to lose this collection will be a disaster to the people of the Sunshine Coast and, indeed, to Queensland. If it is removed, it will never be returned. There is a real risk that if the collection cannot be saved, it will be broken up forever.

At a meeting last Thursday, which I attended, it was determined to form a task force to look at how this collection can be preserved for, as I said, the people of Caloundra, the Sunshine Coast and across Queensland. The meeting was attended by people connected with the museum, the RSL, Vietnam veterans, air cadets, ratepayers and many others, clearly showing a united effort to protect the air museum from destruction. The first meeting of the task force will be held on 1 March to form a strategy for its approach, with the emphasis on retaining the air museum where it is.

Whilst accepting that development and change is inevitable, there is also a clear necessity to protect the historical link to the past. This air museum provides a critical plank to that platform. We must all play a part in this—the community, local government and the state and federal governments. A whole-of-government and community approach is going to be required to protect this important site, which houses historical collections and memorabilia. I am asking the people of the Sunshine Coast to get behind this very important project. It is a project that simply and clearly protects our heritage, not just for ourselves but for those in the years to come.