



Speech by

**Hon. Paul Lucas**

**MEMBER FOR LYTTON**

Hansard Wednesday, 7 February 2007

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## **MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

### **North Queensland, Road Network; Maritime Safety Queensland**

**Hon. PT LUCAS** (Lytton—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (10.11 am): Mr Speaker, as you are aware, far-north Queensland has been inundated with rain over the past week, with some parts of the region receiving more than 1.2 metres of rain in seven days, and Cyclone Nelson is dumping more rain in the north. The Bruce Highway is still closed south of Tully, though Main Roads advises that some heavy vehicles did get through earlier this morning. The highway has reopened at Ingham but, given the cyclone, that situation could change. Following last year's category 5 Cyclone Larry, the federal government provided \$220 million for flood immunity projects on this vital national highway link. Canberra also provided \$148 million for an upgrade of the highway south of Tully, and I thank it for that funding. I should note that the Tully detail and design is currently in progress, with a contract being let for construction in the next month or so.

I thought the Mayor of Cairns, Kevin Byrne, made a very good contribution yesterday on the *Sunrise* program when he underlined the importance of this major federally funded road to north and far-north Queensland. I think we all agree that more funding is needed, and I note positive sounds from federal local representatives to this effect. The money received from the federal government is a very welcomed good start but we will need more and, as Mayor Byrne points out, it will never be financially possible to totally flood-proof the highway between Cairns and Townsville—we would need it all on piers to do that—but federal funding can make a massive difference.

The federal government granted approval for planning and preliminary design of major flood immunity projects not under construction. We shortly expect to receive permission from the federal government for projects that will have detailed planning conducted on them. This work is about reducing what are currently totally unacceptable closure times. It is very important the community has a say in how this \$220 million is best spent, including whether we should have a higher level of flood immunity which might mean shorter closures but on fewer projects and therefore requiring a potential longer time for a fix of the full road. We all know that climate change tells us that severe rainfall events in far-north Queensland will become more frequent, not less frequent. This must also be taken into account in consideration of our response. Main Roads is currently examining these issues so the various project costs can be put in front of the federal government and the community for their input.

The state government has already made progress on a number of projects, including a \$53 million federally funded package of safety works. Several projects that got underway in early November, including traffic lights on the Bruce Highway through Innisfail at Lily Street, were completed in December, and two pavement rehabilitation projects north and south of Innisfail are almost complete. On the flood-prone section just south of Ingham from Tokalon Road to McIlwraith Street, Main Roads has completed planning and is currently undertaking detailed design. Construction is set to begin mid-2007 and will be completed by 2008.

Planning and design work for major flood immunity projects has also begun on a number of other projects including the Mulgrave River at Gordonvale and several crossings in the Herbert River flood plain

north and south of Ingham. Planning and design work has been completed for a four-lane upgrade between Woodlands Shopping Centre and Veales Road. Main Roads has sent a separate funding submission to the federal transport department for this project. As both the state and federal governments have acknowledged, this funding will not be enough to do the whole job but it is a good start, and once again I thank the federal government for this funding. I am determined not to play politics with this. I want to work cooperatively with both sides of this parliament and also with both sides of federal politics on what is this very important road.

Also briefly, Maritime Safety Queensland is assisting the federal Rescue Coordination Centre in Canberra with arrangements for the evacuation of a crew of 12 from the vessel *Wunma*. The ship, owned by Century Mine, was transferring zinc concentrate and lead to larger vessels offshore from Karumba. It was attempting to outrun the cyclone when it became caught in heavy seas. The vessel is in Australian not Queensland territorial waters and is therefore under federal AMSA jurisdiction. Latest reports suggest the *Wunma* is anchored 50 nautical miles off the coast, but with its engine room and cargo hold flooded the vessel is slowly sinking. A trawler should be on site within about four hours to retrieve the crew and a helicopter is on standby if earlier evacuation is needed.