



Speech by

Hon. Paul Lucas

MEMBER FOR LYTTON

Hansard Wednesday, 7 March 2007

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

North Queensland Roads

Hon. PT LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (10.13 am): There has been a lot of discussion about the future of the National Highway between Cairns and Townsville after flooding closures on the Bruce Highway last month. Following Cyclone Larry last year, the federal government provided \$220 million for some flood immunity projects on this vital National Highway link. Canberra also provided \$148 million for an upgrade of the highway south of Tully. Again, I thank the federal government for that funding. As I have pointed out a number of times—and as the federal government has noted as well—the extra funding clearly will not provide absolute flood immunity for the Bruce Highway between Townsville and Cairns, but it will substantially reduce the time that the link is closed due to flooding. That is why it is important to talk to the community about what they can expect from these works and what they want in the future.

For that reason, I will be visiting north Queensland tomorrow and Friday to inspect flooding trouble spots and to meet with peak groups, including local mayors, to discuss upgrading and flood immunity issues. This is not an opportunity to play politics. I am not going to go up there, putting it on the federal government and having a go at it. This is an opportunity to undertake consultation and talk to the community about the issues. I will be on the road, driving from Townsville to the Cardwell Range and into Cairns inspecting flood-prone areas of the Bruce Highway. I am keen to talk to the groups along the Townsville to Cairns corridor about the planning for the flood immunity upgrades and involve them in the decision-making process. Rest assured, I will be taking every opportunity in the future to raise road projects that the federal government could have constructed with the money it has wasted building a bypass of the Ipswich Motorway that is \$1.2 billion more expensive than the preferred alternative. But that is not the purpose of this trip, and I do not propose to do it that way.

Given that the funds being provided for the National Highway will not provide a flood-free route between Townsville and Cairns, it is important the community be consulted so that they understand that point. An integral part of this is establishing a widely accepted flood immunity objective for future upgrades to be consistently applied to projects along the whole link.

The state government has already made progress on a number of projects, including a \$53 million federally funded package of safety works. 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 on the Herbert River flood plain north and south of Ingham. Planning and design work has also 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 department of transport for this project. I should also clarify some comments the Leader of the Opposition made on radio when he was in far-north Queensland recently.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr LUCAS: Just listen to what I say. He said that the state government had received the funds from the federal government and should get construction underway. While it is true that the federal government has provided funding in advance of actual works—which is not normally done—Canberra still needs to decide which projects will actually be constructed. It is like lawyers or accountants receiving money in a trust account. They cannot go off and just spend it. I would love to go off and spend this money and do what I like, but I cannot do that. I need permission from Canberra. Main Roads met with federal transport representatives on 7 December last year to discuss the various projects. We are yet to hear from the federal government about how it would like to proceed. I have written to the Deputy Prime Minister, Mark Vaile—and I specifically raised this with him last week—regarding the need for the federal government to give us permission to proceed further. I would like to reiterate the importance of involving the local community in addressing the broader issues—which is exactly why I am travelling to far-north Queensland tomorrow and Friday.