



Speech by

Hon. Paul Lucas

MEMBER FOR LYTTON

Hansard Tuesday, 13 March 2007

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Bruce Highway, North Queensland

Hon. PT LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (10.16 am): Late last week I did what hundreds of north Queenslanders do every day—that is, drive the Bruce Highway between Townsville and Cairns. The trip was a two-day familiarisation of flood problem areas on the highway to which the federal government has allocated \$348 million.

With me was a team of Main Roads engineers who have highlighted the complexity and the challenges associated with improving flood immunity on the Bruce Highway. That is not to say it cannot be done, but in the south when people think of a bridge over a creek they conjure up an image of a structure just a few metres in length. Yet in the north and far north a creek and its flood plain can literally stretch several kilometres—in the case of Tully-Murray, 15 kilometres.

Floodworks on the highway near Tully that are due to start in May are a perfect example. I inspected eight flooding trouble spots between Townsville and Cairns with the engineers, their diagrams and hydrology studies, along with local community leaders. The member for Hinchinbrook and Mayor Galliano were with me and we spent time in a culvert on the Tully-Murray flood plain very instructively having a look at the issues involved in flooding there and also seeing the safety issues that will be remedied out of this project which the federal government is funding.

The trip was also about assessing local expectations on the level of flood immunity and some of the longer term options, such as identifying corridors for future bypasses. Local mayors and interest groups were briefed in Cairns on the progress of delivering on the \$348 million memorandum of understanding with the federal government. They now appreciate that, while we are meeting the time line set in agreement with the federal government, there is an understanding that the money from the federal government, although welcome, will not flood-proof the Bruce Highway and nor will it be enough to do all that is required. But it was not the time or place for criticising the federal government's form on roads in the north.

We are looking to the future. The mayors, community groups and I agree that we need an ongoing commitment from Canberra in the years ahead to bring the Bruce Highway up to the national standard to cut closure times and improve safety. On 7 December DOTARS and Main Roads agreed to recommend to the Commonwealth minister the next stage of approvals for us to get on with the job. I look forward to hearing from the federal government minister with respect to that. This was a unique opportunity to do it on a non-political basis with community representatives. I thank all members on both sides of politics who have played a very productive role.