



Speech by

Andrew Cripps

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

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MOTION: CAIRNS HOSPITAL, ORDER FOR THE PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

Mr CRIPPS (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (6.57 pm): Tonight I am pleased to rise to support the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition and seconded by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, and to oppose the amendment moved by the Premier and seconded by the Minister for Health. A debate about the Cairns Base Hospital is an appropriate topic during the regional sitting of parliament in Cairns because the history of the Cairns Base Hospital under the Goss, Beattie and Bligh Labor governments is a very sorry story indeed. In far-north Queensland our major referral hospital is the Cairns Base Hospital, which services a population of about 250,000 people from as far south as Cardwell, north to the Atherton Tableland, Cape York and the Torres Strait and, indeed, the city of Cairns. This is a problem not only for the electorates based on the city of Cairns but also for the electorates of Cook, Tablelands, Mulgrave and my electorate of Hinchinbrook. It is clear to many stakeholders in far-north Queensland, the medical profession and the general public that the Cairns Base Hospital should have been relocated and expanded back in the mid-1990s, but the Goss Labor government made a short-sighted decision to scrap the relocation, a mistake that former Labor member for Cairns Keith De Lacy has admitted was wrong and the people of far-north Queensland have lamented ever since.

Instead of the state Labor government recognising this mistake and correcting it when it had the opportunity earlier this year, the Bligh Labor government also ignored the advice of the incumbent member for Cairns, Desley Boyle, and resolved to put hundreds of millions of dollars into the Cairns Base Hospital at its current location. Yesterday I asked a question of the Minister for Health in relation to comments by the member for Cairns earlier this year when she called for a brand-new hospital in Cairns. In relation to the current site she said—

I don't see that we can hold on to the existing site and provide the beds we need to provide.

The health minister tried to reconcile the obvious inconsistencies between the views of the state Labor government and the member for Cairns by saying that it was okay for his cabinet colleague to have a different view from the rest of the cabinet because she was standing up for her community. If the Minister for Health is such a big fan of the member for Cairns standing up for her community, why doesn't he take her advice and pursue a greenfield site for the Cairns Base Hospital now? The reason the Minister for Health and the state Labor government did not and will not take the advice of the member for Cairns is that the ALP takes the seat of Cairns and the people of Cairns for granted. It believes that it can continue to deliver second-best solutions to a second-best problem.

The situation in Cairns is serious. A shortage of beds and pressure on staff and resources is having an adverse effect on the welfare of patients throughout far-north Queensland. I pay tribute to the hardworking doctors and nurses and support staff at the Cairns Base Hospital who work in very difficult circumstances indeed. It is a dangerous situation. The problems at Cairns Base Hospital have not occurred overnight. These problems have been building for over a decade. Yet successive state Labor governments have ignored the growing needs of the Cairns Base Hospital and the communities of far-north Queensland.

The pressure on the state government following a campaign by local community groups, business leaders and the *Cairns Post* newspaper to do something about the Cairns Base Hospital saw yet another crisis management plan thrown together which involved selling off Cairns Airport to pay for the construction of a new hospital in Cairns some time over the next two decades. In the meantime the state Labor government will try to put a bandaid solution on a bandaid solution and undertake a second upgrade on a hospital located on a site that is inadequate for the health needs of far-north Queensland.

An important question for the people of Cairns and far-north Queensland to ponder is this: can Labor's second upgrade of the existing Cairns Base Hospital, given that the upgrade needs to take place while the hospital continues to operate at full capacity, occur before a new hospital on a greenfield site could be constructed and come online? The LNP offers a genuine alternative—a new hospital in Cairns servicing the city of Cairns and communities throughout far-north Queensland on a greenfield site within five years.

The LNP offers real consultation with input from far-north Queenslanders through a community reference group which will be asked to consider issues such as the greenfield site and the clinical services offered at the hospital. This city is served by four Labor MPs, two of whom are cabinet ministers, but this seems to be of little benefit to Cairns. The people of far-north Queensland deserve better.

Ten years of the Beattie-Bligh Labor government and the best that this Labor government can do for the Cairns Base Hospital and far-north Queensland is offer a new hospital within the next 10 or 20 years. In contrast, the LNP is ready to deliver. It is willing to make the hard decisions, decisions to plan for the future with a new hospital that will provide for the health requirements of far-north Queensland.