



Speech by
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MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

Hansard Tuesday, 16 June 2009

FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND REGIONAL PLAN

Mr PITT (Mulgrave—ALP) (12.05 pm): The FNQ 2031 regional statutory plan is the blueprint that will guide the growth in Far North Queensland through the next 20 years. It will create jobs, limit urban sprawl and protect the region's natural beauty. The plan also puts more than 99 per cent of Far North Queensland off limits to urban development. This means future generations of Queenslanders and tourists will be able to continue to enjoy the region's natural beauty, from the World Heritage listed Wet Tropics to the Great Barrier Reef.

People from right across Far North Queensland had their say and helped shape this plan. The Bligh government listened to close to 1,000 submissions on the draft plan and made changes to create more certainty for the tourism industry in these tough times. There were significant changes to deliver stronger environmental protection as well as some real wins for farmers.

If those opposite had won government, they would have scrapped this award-winning regional plan and handed the future of Far North Queensland over to the development industry, meaning decisions largely based on profitability. Taxpayers and ratepayers would have to pick up the bill for infrastructure and essential services that should really have been met by developers.

I am very excited and privileged to be the state member for Mulgrave at a time that is crucial to managing population growth and planning for future schools, essential services and green space for sport and recreation. Our focus is now on implementation of the plan in order to achieve the outcomes that the community is seeking and the targets it has set the government for the region.

Three-quarters of new homes identified in FNQ 2031 will be around Cairns, particularly in a new master planned community located between Edmonton and Gordonvale. The 1,200 hectare site is known as the Mount Peter area. It is the priority urban growth corridor for Cairns and has been identified as the last remaining land in the Cairns area with few natural constraints. It is expected to provide a mix of housing types and densities for up to 50,000 people. Led by the Cairns Regional Council, this project represents one of the largest master planning exercises undertaken in Queensland. The council is already hard at work doing the planning to shape this future community.

Over 100 people attended an inquiry by design workshop in February of this year. Several key issues emerged from the inquiry by design workshop that need further consideration and have already generated some debate, such as management of the riparian corridors along waterways and integration of a rapid transit system with residential development.

During the election campaign I expressed concerns that the workshop highlighted some inconsistencies between regional planning processes. For example, the Mount Peter master plan assumes a population growth of only 35,000 people and FNQ 2031 projects 50,000. A reduced population figure may contribute to a housing affordability crisis for future residents as infrastructure charges will be borne by fewer people.

Mount Peter will be supported by a new town centre and enterprise precinct at Edmonton, but it must be more than just a dormitory suburb, still reliant on the rest of Cairns for employment. The attraction

of major businesses as well will generate significant employment and may also reduce traffic congestion by removing the need for many people to travel daily into Cairns. However, a series of subregional retail hubs should be established between Edmonton and Gordonvale instead of simply enabling highly concentrated retail development. This will promote opportunities for small business and ensure community services remain accessible. Both outcomes can be delivered through careful planning.

The Bligh government's commitment to the construction of a second major hospital in the southern suburbs of Cairns will also have a significant impact on residential and retail planning. Like many, I want to see my home town of Gordonvale continue to grow, but not to the extent that has been laid out thus far. The Mount Peter master plan must deliver measured growth to Gordonvale without destroying the uniqueness of its character. Residents should have the opportunity to work, live and play in a vibrant community that has character of its own. I have made a commitment to work with division 1 councillor Paul Gregory on a Gordonvale area plan which would require significant community input.

The inquiry by design process also flagged the future of the cane tramway system and its interaction with development in the area. At this stage of the planning process, major retail growth centres are sited in such a way that may render the cane rail nonviable, thus impacting negatively on the sugar industry. The long-term viability of the Mulgrave Central Mill could be put in jeopardy if the Mount Peter master plan does not get it right. Now more than ever we should not forget that more than 1,200 jobs in the Cairns region and the livelihoods of many farming families depend on the ongoing operations of the mill.

There is still a long way to go before the planning for Mount Peter is set in stone. The process will continue over the next two years, with large scale physical development of the corridor expected to commence after that and continue for at least the next 20 years. The future of Far North Queensland is at a crossroad, and I am pleased that I am able to play a leadership role at such a pivotal time in the region's development. This government will continue to work with the Cairns Regional Council and landowners to ensure the structure plan adequately reflects the planning needs of the community and its future growth.