



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE

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MOTION: FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND REGIONAL PLAN

Mr KNUTH (Dalrymple—LNP) (4.27 pm): I rise to speak in the debate on the regulatory provisions of the Far North Queensland Regional Plan. We all acknowledge the growth in Far North Queensland. We recognise that my electorate, which takes in the majority of the Tablelands Regional Council area, has great opportunities to build and diversify its strong agricultural base and capitalise on mining growth. The area has the potential to provide food security not just for that region but for the whole of Australia. We need to ensure that incentives are provided to create opportunities and investment which in turn creates jobs. We need to support the tourism, mining and grazing activities.

The first stage of consultation on this plan was flawed. I have in front of me nine key changes to the initial regional land use categories. The government was very critical of our position. We knew that there were issues that needed to be addressed. What I have here are nine changes. That was what we were asking for. We were asking for those changes. The original plan was flawed.

I would like to acknowledge that many participants were unhappy. I acknowledge that the Tablelands community continually raised the concerns of landholders and other stakeholders with regard to the flawed mapping process adopted by the government in developing the 2025 plan.

Among the problems was the failure of the original document to adequately include information such as important regulations and environmental maps. The findings were also disputed with condemnation from the public about inadequate consultation, ambiguity in the plan and uncertainty about the future rights of freehold landholders. There is no doubt that the plan has improved from the original draft plan handed down. However, I still believe that the plan requires finetuning—something the LNP is committed to if elected to government. How dare I say that! I cannot bring that up! I acknowledge that the changes in the current 2009 to 2031 plan have been as a result of hard work by those who were concerned with the details of the former 2025 plan, especially in terms of changes to land use categories. Areas in north Milla Milla have been added to the urban footprint as a direct result of community concern and it is something that is essential, because Milla Milla will need to find areas of expansion, especially for industry, after the dairy deregulation and the closure of the cheese factory have had such a dramatic impact on the area.

The Tablelands Regional Council's request for time to allow further investigation of alternative growth areas at Tolga has been acknowledged in this plan. This was as a direct result from the council's concern and the community's concern that areas south of Atherton were categorised as areas of urban footprint across vast areas of prime rural farming land. As Wondecla is not connected to Herberton as far as infrastructure and essential services are concerned and most areas have been designated as rural residential and while the first draft plan attempted to place Wondecla as urban, it is heartening to see that the plan for Wondecla's urban footprint has been removed in response to community concerns regarding growth in the area and the lack of planned infrastructure.

This was a very big issue because Wondecla, especially the Green Springs Rolly Road area, has always been rural/residential. Under the 2025 plan, it became urban and then all of a sudden a development was smacked at the top end of Wondecla—that is, the Green Springs development at Rolly Road—and we were led to believe that up to 300 development blocks were being proposed. So it was

rural/residential but then under the 2025 plan it was designated as urban. I am very pleased that that has changed, because if a development is on top of an area near a stream such as Wondecla Creek when all of the smaller blocks are below—that is, the one acre to five acre category—there is no water and no sewerage. That development would have been a catastrophe in its present form. It is great to see that that has been rectified, because I wrote letters to the previous minister for planning, Paul Lucas, and I appreciate that he has addressed those concerns.

Another heartache for residents in the area is rural properties too small to generate sufficient income but too large to maintain, especially for elderly residents who have lived in the area for generations. These residents want the opportunity to subdivide their land to cater for family members or for retirement or superannuation purposes. In these instances they should be able to negotiate terms with members of the local councils who know the people and know the area and who are not governed by bureaucrats or the limits set by plans.

I turn now to a Wujul Wujul Far North Queensland Regional Plan fact sheet that says that the regional use categories allow for a range of uses, including private housing, community activities and incidental commercial and retail activities. I believe that it is very important in those Far North Queensland regions to provide opportunities for commercial and retail activities, especially in Indigenous communities. Therefore, it is very important that we do not continue to push for more World Heritage areas and continue to lock up our river systems because that removes the social and economic development potential in those regions. That takes away jobs, and that is why many Indigenous communities are not very happy with this position. In saying that and in terms of the Premier's proposal to get support from the federal government to create more World Heritage areas, all it does is lock up the area and takes away sustainable management and potential development that will create jobs for Aboriginal communities.

I will give the House an example of what this plan desperately needs which illustrates the difficulties in trying to get development in those Indigenous communities. An accredited meat processor by the name of Harvey Douglas, an environmentalist, was mortified by the massive denigration to the beauty and uniqueness of the cape caused by the huge number of feral animals. Harvey devised a simple yet effective solution to unemployment in the Far North and received much media coverage. Harvey has invented a mobile abattoir that can be transported into areas infested with feral animals and which can be used to harvest the feral animals. This would provide employment for up to 200 local Aboriginal residents, and this regional plan talks about creating commercial and retail activities. The meat could be sold to local councils for their feral dog control programs. The latest figures available on the damage caused by feral dogs put the cost at around \$100 million per year. The creation of a sustainable Indigenous-run culling industry would have multiple benefits for the region such as employing Indigenous residents, a reduction in the number of feral animals and meat for feral dog control programs throughout the country.

In addition, the processing of these animals is a prerequisite for accreditation for human consumption which could then be exported to far more lucrative overseas markets. Access to these markets would provide stable ongoing employment for Indigenous residents and export dollars for Queensland. It is important that when developing these plans and looking for employment opportunities we take proposals such as this into consideration. However, since putting the proposal forward, Harvey has been battling with bureaucracy to try to establish lucrative businesses for the benefit of Indigenous people. I understand that Harvey met with delegates from the minister's office in June to discuss the program and was promised an action plan in two weeks and assistance in negotiating with local councils and government departments. However, Harvey has received only a letter that has delivered nothing on what was promised.

This scenario raises serious questions about the commitment of the government to address the ongoing difficult issues such as closing the gap to employment for Indigenous Australians, especially in the far north. This is a great opportunity to give independence and long-term employment to Aboriginal residents in an industry within their own lands. This proposal would provide an ongoing program to address the environmental damage in the far north caused by plagues of feral animals in the region and gain export dollars for the state as well. This program will continue to provide benefits for not only the environment but also the state. I also question the minister as to how many properties have been purchased by the government in the Cape York Peninsula for national parks.

Mr O'Brien interjected.

Mr KNUTH: That is right, and why are they doing this? All we are seeing is property prices being driven up in the gulf while at the same time creating more World Heritage areas.

With regional plans it is very important to consider areas such as health. We can have a plan to develop a particular region in terms of what you can and cannot do, but if we cannot provide the necessary resources such as appropriate health services to those regions that development will not work. I give the House the example of the need for a CT scanner at Atherton. We have been lobbying for this for five years. People are forced to use the Cairns Base Hospital. Each year up to 1,500 people are forced to use the Cairns Base Hospital because Atherton does not have a CT scanner. Regional plans such as this are an

opportunity to address these kinds of issues, especially when it comes to health. It is the same with the roads in these areas. We can develop plans for sustainable management for agriculture and locking up areas, but those plans will not work if we do not have decent roads in those areas. I refer in particular to the Milla Milla to Atherton road, a road which many of us consider to be a catastrophe. It is the same with the road from Herberton to Irvinebank. That is a very dangerous road. More money needs to be spent on this road to sustain that region and in order to prevent accidents.

Likewise, the Kennedy Highway—from the East Evelyn Road to the intersection of the Kennedy Highway and Tumoulin Road—is not accessible to B-doubles. It is a major highway, but it is like a billy goat track. I want to bring this matter to the attention of the House. Hopefully, those issues that I have mentioned will be addressed.