



Speech by

Hon. Stirling Hinchliffe

MEMBER FOR STAFFORD

Hansard Thursday, 17 September 2009

MOTION: FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND REGIONAL PLAN

Hon. SJ HINCHLIFFE (Stafford—ALP) (Minister for Infrastructure and Planning) (2.54 pm): I move—

That the House—

1. notes the Regulatory Provisions of the Far North Queensland Regional Plan (the Plan) that was tabled in the Legislative Assembly as part of the Plan on 19 June 2009; and
2. ratifies the Regulatory Provisions of the Plan under section 2.5A.17 of the Integrated Planning Act 1997.

The delivery of the statutory regional plan for the Far North Queensland region is a key example of how the Bligh government continues to lead the way nationally in regional planning. It is indeed unique. Nowhere else in Australia has a statutory regional plan with regulatory provisions been introduced without it being centred on a capital city.

The Far North Queensland Regional Plan is accompanied by a set of state planning regulatory provisions that regulate land use and development throughout the region. They came into effect on 13 February 2009 when the plan was released. The regulatory provisions are based on the plan's three land use categories. They come with 35 regulatory maps showing the distribution of the land use categories throughout the region. The regulatory provisions supersede the draft regulatory provisions released with the Far North Queensland Draft Regional Plan 2025 on 9 May 2008.

The FNQ Regional Plan provides a sound framework for much needed development in the FNQ region. The region is expected to grow by approximately 5,000 people per annum. Three-quarters of the 100,000 people who are expected to move to the FNQ region over the next 20 years are expected to settle in Cairns. As identified in the plan, Mount Peter alone is expected to cater for up to 50,000 additional people.

The future of valuable rural lands in the FNQ region is assured by the strict but sensible controls for development. Conservation, including the protection of the Wet Tropics World Heritage areas is also strengthened through the framework of the regional plan. This includes planning for state and regional wildlife corridors to facilitate biodiversity conservation outcomes in the region.

The state planning regulatory provisions are a result of extensive consultation with the community and the incorporation of their numerous suggestions and improvements. Far North Queensland is one of the fastest growing urban regions outside the south-east corner of the state. With a current population of 220,000 residents—and a projected growth of more than 100,000 new people over the next 20 years—governments and communities face significant challenges to manage this growth in a way that balances development with the local lifestyle.

The Queensland government announced in 2006 that it would develop a statutory regional plan for the region to meet these challenges. The Far North Queensland Regional Plan 2025 regulatory provisions carry a range of powers to manage FNQ's anticipated high population growth and protect its unique environmental features. The FNQ 2025 and draft state planning regulatory provisions, the SPRP, were released for public comment by the Premier, Anna Bligh, and the Deputy Premier and then Minister for

Infrastructure and Planning, Paul Lucas, on 9 May 2008 to give the community the opportunity to have their say.

The public consultation period for the draft regional plan concluded on 8 August 2008, resulting in over 960 submissions. This demonstrates the high level of interest from community and industry in the development of the region's future. A consultation report was released on 28 October 2008 that summarised the issues raised during the public comment period as a result of the initial analysis of the submissions identified that the draft regional plan was generally well received by the community.

However, there are specific issues that have traditionally polarised community sectors that required further consultation with the public to ensure the best possible outcomes for the region. The strategic issues identified in this consultation report were: biodiversity conservation, protection of waterways and water quality, provision of industrial land, and subdivision and boundary realignments outside the urban footprint. Targeted consultation forums with key stakeholders and submitters in Cairns were conducted in October 2008—and I attended a couple of those while we were in Cairns for the regional sitting of parliament—to further explore workable solutions for these issues. This targeted consultation concluded on 28 November 2008. Properly made submissions to the consultation report were carefully analysed and the draft plan substantially amended to take into account many of the suggestions raised through the consultation process, specifically around the setback requirements for non-agricultural activities near waterways, for instance.

Mr Wettenhall: A government that listens.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: I take that interjection from the member for Barron River. In total, close to 1,000 submissions on the draft plan were received during both periods of public consultation.

Mr Malone: How many objections?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: Submissions. Clearly, the member for Mirani does not understand the process. This government recognised that, as good as the draft regional plan was in identifying local issues, more work was needed to ensure the local issues were appropriately addressed. Consequently, significant changes were made to the final plan and regulatory provisions to deliver stronger environmental protection as well as some real wins for farmers.

This plan encourages voluntary rehabilitation of nature corridors by landowners for our native animals and plants. After listening to farmers' concerns, councils will be able to approve boundary realignments in instances where parcels of land have been inadvertently isolated by roads or easements. Any changes must improve agricultural efficiency or diversification, resolve tenure issues or result in conservation gains. It is important to note when boundaries are realigned that landowners must provide buffers, where necessary, for any neighbouring land uses.

The provisions contain tighter controls and buffer zones for urban development near wetlands and waterways to protect the environment and wildlife. The consultation undertaken on the regional plan is a primary example of the commitment of the Bligh government to seek the community's view on local issues. This government worked hard to ensure that the final regional plan responded to the community's concerns and to aspirations of the region. I acknowledge the acknowledgment that the member for Hinchinbrook has expressed in response to that.

Additionally, the input provided by the FNQ Regional Coordination Committee on the state planning regulatory provisions and the FNQ Regional Plan is a further testament to the power of collaboration between state and local government and other key stakeholder groups. The success of community and stakeholder engagement for the regulatory provisions is demonstrated by the significant improvements made between the draft and the final plan, and the significant levels of community support.

I will conclude by encouraging active debate from the members of this House, particularly those from Far North Queensland, about this award-winning regional plan initiative. I look forward to hearing their comments. I commend the Far North Queensland Regional Plan state planning regulatory provisions to the House.