



Speech by

## Hon. Stirling Hinchliffe

MEMBER FOR STAFFORD

Hansard Thursday, 17 September 2009

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### MOTION: FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND REGIONAL PLAN

**Hon. SJ HINCHLIFFE** (Stafford—ALP) (Minister for Infrastructure and Planning) (5.04 pm): I thank members for their contributions to the debate on the Far North Queensland Regional Plan regulatory provisions. The FNQ region now has balanced, carefully considered and regionally relevant regulatory provisions that will help protect the diverse regional landscape and rural production values of the region whilst promoting land use and infrastructure efficiencies to meet the challenges of the next 20 years of growth. As stated by my colleague the Minister for Local Government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, and most significantly in this context the member for Cairns, the SPRP is about actively managing growth in the region, not simply responding to it.

The Bligh government is committed, through the FNQ Regional Plan, to providing a framework to support the region's needs for housing affordability. The urban footprint will provide a 20-year land supply—some certainty for the region—ensuring housing affordability in Far North Queensland.

The regional plan provides a comprehensive framework. It provides a regional vision; sets strong strategic directions; clearly identifies a regional land use pattern; provides clear subregional narratives to guide more detailed strategic planning by local governments and government agencies; and provides detailed policies and strategies for the natural environment, regional landscape and natural resources, strong communities, urban development, economic development, infrastructure, water management and transport—that panoply of significant issues that need to be dealt with in a regional plan. These provisions provide the support for the undertakings contained within the plan.

The regional plan and the associated SPRP recognise and encapsulate key planning concerns of the region and have been born from one of the most extensive consultation processes outside of the South-East Queensland region. Key issues identified during the consultation process enabled the government at the time to set clear policy directions and to announce further opportunities for informal community stakeholder meetings which enabled more detailed refinements to be made to the plan and the SPRP.

A number of members on this side of the House have remarked upon the quite confused set of commentaries we have heard from the other side of the House about the process. We had people criticising the fact that there were changes between the draft plan and the final plan.

**Mr Cripps:** No-one criticised that.

**Mr HINCHLIFFE:** The member for Dalrymple criticised the fact that there were changes between the draft plan and the final plan. This is clearly evidence of the strength of the process in that it responded to community needs and of the consultation itself. The work of officers based in the region and the extensive consultation culminated in a plan which has received widespread support from conservationists, the development industry, peers in the planning profession and the community at large.

It gives me great pleasure to acknowledge that the regional plan has already received two highly acclaimed awards at both a state and national level from the Planning Institute of Australia. The FNQ Regional Plan and the consultation process that led to its finalisation recognised four key areas of interest:

biodiversity conservation, protection of waterways and water quality, provision of industrial land, and subdivision and boundary realignments outside the urban footprint.

In relation to the member for Gympie's comments, the regional plan clearly supports the important \$2 billion of agricultural production in the region. The fact that it protects around 99.5 per cent of the area from urban development is evidence of that. Apart from limiting urban development to those areas that can best deal with such needs, the regional plan also provides the necessary framework to realise many of the new urbanism concepts for development that are more responsive to transit oriented design, energy efficiency, tropical living and high-amenity mixed use development.

The Mount Peter declared master planned area is an area that is directly identified by the regional plan, which is undergoing detailed planning to incorporate the desired regional outcomes and land use policies of the regional plan that I outlined. I particularly acknowledge the member for Mulgrave's passion and commitment to excellent outcomes in his part of the region.

We saw highlighted in the contribution by the member for Barron River during this debate how important tourism is. Tourism is recognised as a key aspect of development in the Far North Queensland region. The SPRP provides for broad-ranging tourist development within the urban footprint. In the rural areas, the SPRP recognises opportunities for sensitive tourist development that complements the natural environment yet is still able to showcase the region and provide much-needed employment opportunities.

Tourist activities with a gross floor area of no more than 2,000 square metres, with no more than 250 square metres of incidental commercial or retail activity and with any short-term accommodation being for 100 persons or fewer can proceed without the need for any reference to the SPRP. Medium sized tourist activities with a gross floor area of no more than 4,000 square metres are assessed against the SPRP. Larger tourist developments outside the urban footprint must meet a stringent test demonstrating that there is an overriding public need for such development as well as satisfy strict locational and environmental criteria. There are no restrictions on the opportunity; there is just a clear and well articulated set of guidelines.

The regional plan is a significant step forward for all Queenslanders. It is the first statutory, regional land use plan in Far North Queensland and will be pivotal in protecting the region's outstanding regional landscape and rural production values. I am pleased the member for Burdekin recognised the importance of sustainable planning in protecting the unique Far North Queensland environment.

The regional plan and SPRP have sought to reflect practical outcomes identified during the consultation process. Allowances have been made for the subdivision of lots severed by roads and for a range of community uses. The SPRP also provides sufficient flexibility to consider proposals of regional benefit where these have not previously been planned. The SPRP allows for designations of rural precincts. The SPRP does not apply to development applications for premises in a rural precinct consistent with the precinct. Rural precincts provide flexibility to consider meritorious developments.

I would like to particularly thank the member for Cook for facilitating this process and this outcome. It is not about overriding goals for urban development containment. These provisions are currently being considered, for instance, as an option to address land use aspirations of the Indigenous communities within the region, such as the communities of Kuku Yalanji. The SPRP forms an important aspect of the regional planning framework by ensuring that critical matters are considered straightaway by local assessment managers and applicants. A key advantage of the SPRP is that it is immediately effective in the integrated development assessment system. This avoids any potential delay in implementation.

Since the adoption of the FNQ Regional Plan, I was able to chair a meeting of the Regional Coordination Committee during last month. From that meeting, it is clear that the regional framework that is provided by the regional plan and the SPRP has provided a sound basis for the RCC to move forward in establishing a Regional Plan Implementation Group to define and progress priority actions under the regional plan.

Local governments have also generally indicated a willingness to reflect the regional plan provisions in their local planning scheme provisions. The regional plan recognises the strong role of the community in setting the direction of the region's future and strongly advocates ongoing community participation in decision-making processes.

The SPRP recognises and promotes this objective in a very practical manner by setting the level of assessment for those development proposals which exceed maximum thresholds to impact assessment. The SPRP paves the way for ongoing and sound planning and decision making for the FNQ region over the next 20 years and beyond in what is a truly beautiful part of Australia, a truly beautiful part of our state of Queensland, which requires a careful balance between the environment, regulation and progress. I believe the SPRP gets that balance right.

I would like to thank all members from Far North Queensland for their contributions today and their ongoing representation of their constituents. I should also acknowledge, as a number of members have, the particularly important role that the Deputy Premier and the then Minister for Infrastructure and Planning played in getting this balance right. In closing, I urge the House to support this award-winning Far North Queensland Regional Plan 2031 and the state planning regulatory provisions.