




Speech by
Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

Hansard Wednesday, 6 June 2012

REEF AND RAINFOREST RESEARCH CENTRE

 **Mr PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (10.52 pm): Cairns based not-for-profit organisation the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre has taken the initiative in partnering with Papua New Guinea's treaty village association to deliver a multimillion dollar proposal called the socioeconomic and development project for the PNG traditional inhabitants of the treaty villages. The proposed program is designed to increase environmental, economic and social sustainability of the coastal communities of the South Fly District, addressing such issues as health, quarantine, customs, biosecurity, food security, human and resource security and border protection.

This initiative by the RRRC has been a collaboration forged with various groups both here in Queensland, in particular the Torres Strait, and in the Western Province of PNG. I have received briefs and have worked with the RRRC for many months, talking to anyone who would listen, and have seen the continual development of this proposal, which will address a number of these challenges through the provision of community-level training to PNG nationals of practical techniques to deliver turtle, dugong and fisheries sustainability, coastal surveillance and monitoring, and conservation and protection activities for their community and the surrounding management areas.

Australia has an important role to play in the development of PNG. For too long state and federal governments on both sides have played politics at the expense of our northern neighbours. By looking after the health, development and welfare of the peoples of the treaty villages, we support the health and biosecurity services of the Torres Strait and mainland Australia. There has been a long history of friendship between Australia and PNG, and this kind of project reinforces that commitment.

This proposal should not be misunderstood. It is not about aid; it is about building capacity in the true sense of the word, providing training as well as real work opportunities. This project gives them the skills and a say over their future. It is important to note that I support this proposal not only because it benefits PNG residents but also because it will benefit businesses in the Cairns region as well as in the Torres Strait. This project has the potential to bring much needed work to Australian companies and to the tropical north including: boatbuilding, with up to 20 vessels being built; providing 25 trainer and mentor jobs for the ranger training program in Cairns and the Torres Strait; utilising tropical expertise skills out of Cairns for marine, wetland and rainforest protected area management; remote area energy supplied, solar and micro hydro, from Cairns companies; construction jobs in the provision of high security for remote areas; and ranger equipment being sourced from Cairns suppliers.

I congratulate Sheriden Morris and her team at RRRC and members of the treaty village association for pressing ahead with the proposal. This is despite neither the state government nor the federal government committing funding. I do, however, wish to acknowledge the Cairns regional director, Anne Clark, from State Development, Infrastructure and Planning for her hard work and collaboration. The RRRC is a great example of tropical expertise prowess, and this model has the potential to be rolled out in other developing Pacific nations, showing yet again the extraordinary potential of Far North Queensland as a centre of tropical expertise. This proposal is a win for the Cairns economy and a win for the Torres Strait, and I urge both the Queensland and Australian governments to come to the table and support and partner this great initiative. We need it to work for the sake of our region.