




Speech by

Gavin King

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

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CAIRNS, CHINA EASTERN AIRLINES

 **Mr KING** (Cairns—LNP) (12.00 pm): I rise today to talk about the incredible excitement buzzing around Cairns in recent weeks. Only a few short days ago it was a great honour—in fact, probably the highlight of my short term since being elected—to be in Cairns to welcome the very first China Eastern flight into Cairns. It was our government, through our \$8 million Attracting Aviation fund, as well as with our industry and government partners, that put a deal together to secure China Eastern.

I would like to acknowledge the very hard work over a number of years of the members of the tourism industry in Far North Queensland. TTNQ and Cairns Airport have been working incredibly hard for a number of years to secure these flights. It has only been since our government was elected and set up the Attracting Aviation fund that we were able to get that deal over the line.

With my colleague from Barron River, the Deputy Premier and the tourism minister I had the great pleasure of welcoming the vice-chairman and CEO of China Eastern, Mr Ma, to Cairns. We had an incredible couple of functions for them. We had a magnificent welcome banquet the night before the flights arrived.

Mr Johnson: Cairns tourism is back on the map!

Mr KING: I take that interjection from the member for Gregory.

Mr Dowling: One of the four pillars.

Mr KING: One of our four pillars which is absolutely crucial to the city of Cairns and Far North Queensland. On that Wednesday morning at Cairns Airport there were over 100 people from the tourism industry, the mayor and, of course, the Deputy Premier and the tourism minister. The red carpet was literally rolled out. To stand in that crowd and have people applaud as those first Chinese visitors stepped off the plane into the international terminal was absolutely the highlight of my short time since being elected.

I commend the tourism industry and the city as a whole. Cairns has done it incredibly tough in recent years—not helped, of course, by the previous Labor government. The city was absolutely in the doldrums. We had one of the highest unemployment rates in the country. We are still hovering up over nine per cent. But the mood now in Cairns has shifted. Tourism is on the rise, the numbers are good and we are only just starting to see the impact of these first China flights.

Mr Rickuss: Are you learning Mandarin?

Mr KING: We know from business—and people on our side of the House come from such a wide array of the private sector as opposed to the Labor Party—that confidence is what spurs business. It is a mentality thing. When people start seeing activity, they start seeing other businesses invest, the town gets behind that and that momentum and confidence grows.

In terms of learning Mandarin, I have learnt 'ni hao' and I am working on expanding that vocabulary. The other commendation I want to make is to my past employer, the *Cairns Post*. It launched a two-month campaign leading up to these flights, including a daily language class available online. The spirit that has been generated in a community that has been on its knees for many years is very inspiring. Cairns really

has a buzz about it now. Tomorrow we have the absolute astronomical experience of the solar eclipse. We are expecting upwards of 50,000 people to descend on Cairns and Far North Queensland for that event. I have not seen so many dreadlocks in one place before. Cairns is an incredibly exciting place to be at the moment. It is a great honour to represent the people of Cairns. We are only just getting started. I would like to thank in particular the Premier. With respect to my esteemed colleagues from Townsville, there is a general view that Townsville has had it too good for too long. I want to thank the Premier for his commitment to Cairns. We have seen extra police resources, we have seen these new flights and we will get the boot camp happening early next year. Thank you everyone involved in those China Eastern flights.