



Speech by


**Shane Knuth**

**MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE**

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## **CHILLAGOE, CAVE TOURS**

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—KAP) (11.26 pm): I wish to raise an issue that is critical to the future of the small community of Chillagoe in Far North Queensland. Chillagoe is a small community that was built around the mining and smelting of copper, silver, lead and gold at the turn of the century. However, since the closure of the smelter in the town, tourists visiting the world famous caves of Chillagoe have become more and more important to the town's economy.

National parks have been running cave tours since about 1970. At that time there was no charge for the tours. As the tours grew in popularity and required greater resources in terms of manpower and administration, the charge grew to \$11 in 2002. In 2002 the responsibility of handling cave tour bookings was handed over to Chillagoe Hub owners, Jim and Tonia Evans. They were given a five-year-plus contract. Over the past 10 years Jim and Tonia have worked diligently to increase the reputation of the Chillagoe cave tours as one of Far North Queensland's premier tourist destinations.

They negotiated an incremental yearly increase in tour charges which provided a modest income for the state and contribution to the local economy by providing friendly local service and encouraging visitors to the caves to stay in Chillagoe and see the historic smelter site. At present the cave tours bring in \$23 for every adult taking the tour, which is a significant income in a small community like Chillagoe where every dollar spent locally has a great effect not only on the economy but also on the morale and resilience of the community.

Through their dedication to friendly, personal service, Jim and Tonia use the cave tours as a means to draw tourists to spend money in the town on a meal at the Bottom Pub or the Post Office Hotel or stay at the tourist village, the guesthouse, the ecolodge or one of the fine camping grounds Chillagoe has to offer. The Evans's second five-year term is about to end and they decided to allow the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service to put the contract out for tender and see who it might bring to the town.

It is important to note that Jim and Tonia Evans use the earnings received from the cave tours to subsidise the Chillagoe Post Office, which is a vital service to the Chillagoe community as well as the surrounding area which includes remote cattle stations. Members will understand the shock and dismay that Jim and Tonia felt when the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service advised them that the state government would not be renewing the tour sales contract but installing an impersonal ticket machine. A ticket machine that would be unable to refer tourists to the Chillagoe Tourist Village for a nice meal and a cold beer. A ticket machine cannot tell tourists about the historic Post Office Hotel or direct them to the Bogey Hole where their children can have a swim or tell them about the award-winning ecolodge or the iconic Chillagoe Guest House. Jim and Tonia have worked hard. I encourage the minister to investigate this.

*(Time expired)*