




Speech By
Scott Stewart

MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Queensland Nickel

 **Mr STEWART** (Townsville—ALP) (12.04 pm): On 15 February 1866, the municipality of Townsville was proclaimed by Sir George Bowen, Governor of Queensland. Yesterday, 15 February 2016, I had the pleasure of formally attending the Townsville City Council's 150th anniversary ceremonial council meeting. The mayor, Jenny Hill, and councillors presented reports on the various portfolios that recounted the history of the city over those 150 years. Through all of those stories, one factor was obvious: the resilience of the people of Townsville and their ability to dust themselves off when they have been knocked to the ground in the journey of life. People's ability to band together and look after one another during tough times is the binding fabric of society and every member of this House, particularly those representing people in regional Queensland, understand exactly what I am talking about: resilience.

It is resilience and the Palaszczuk government that the people of Townsville are now relying on, because on Friday, 15 January, they were dealt a body blow that brought the city to its knees when Clive Palmer's Queensland Nickel sacked 237 workers, leaving them and their families stranded without a future. By Tuesday, 19 January, the Palaszczuk government had mobilised a support team and conducted a series of forums for affected workers to outline support agencies for them to access and provide help. Those forums were well attended, with over 170 workers turning up. By Thursday, 21 January—six days after the workers had been sacked—the Premier and key ministers met in Townsville and announced a five-point plan to stimulate jobs in North Queensland, including an accelerated work program, expanding retraining and skill initiatives, attracting increased Commonwealth funding, increasing tourism attraction and facilitating key private sector projects.

So what does that look like for the people of Townsville? The Palaszczuk government has identified 11 projects for accelerated delivery, including the construction of overtaking lanes in five locations on the Bruce Highway between Ingham and Ayr, providing an estimated 130 jobs; the replacement of the Arnot Creek Bridge, south of Ingham, providing an estimated 31 jobs; road safety improvements on the Bruce Highway north of Townsville, providing an estimated 58 jobs; road improvements to Herveys Range Road—which I know the member for Thuringowa has been campaigning for since 1 February last year—which will provide an estimated 19 jobs; and the construction of a heavy vehicle decoupling facility on the port access road, providing an estimated five jobs. The Port of Townsville berth 4 upgrade is a \$55 million project and just last week it was announced that the successful contractor is a local firm that will employ 100 local contractors to complete the work. Also, there is the Ergon Energy Townsville depot upgrade stage 2, which is a \$42.5 million project supporting 60 jobs. Under the Queensland government's accelerated works program, more than 430 jobs will be supported, bringing the total funding to \$187 million so far.

As the member for Townsville, one of the highlights for me was being able to announce on Friday last week, on behalf of the Minister for Health, the Hon. Cameron Dick, a one-off grant of \$1 million to support the Salvation Army Townsville recovery services to deliver a drug and alcohol residential rehabilitation centre in Garbutt. Stage 1 of the centre will support 40 jobs during the 12-month construction phase and a further 15 full-time jobs in the centre upon opening. This centre is a win for not only those needing treatment but also for the local community and the Townsville community as a whole. Such facilities ease the burden not only on our healthcare system but also on our judicial system and reduce the cost associated with loss of productivity, work absenteeism, hospitalisation and criminality.

Perhaps the saddest story in the whole Queensland Nickel saga is that, while the Palaszczuk government is pulling out all stops to create jobs, the federal Turnbull LNP government has gone quiet. There has been not one word from them about how they are going to create employment opportunities in the north—all of this occurring when the Prime Minister was visiting the city yesterday. Cue the crickets for a Prime Minister who seemingly does not care about North Queensland despite having a developing northern Australia policy. All we got from the local member for Herbert was the lobbing of a grenade. That is typical of the federal LNP government.