




Speech By
Hon. Mark Furner

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

Record of Proceedings, 14 June 2017

MOTION: REVOCATION OF PROTECTED AREAS

 **Hon. M FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Minister for Local Government and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships) (8.10 pm): I rise to support the motion to revoke by regulation the dedication of parts of the protected area estate under section 32 of the Nature Conservation Act 1992. The lands that Dr Miles has referred to as Heathlands and Jardine River Resource Reserves hold significant cultural value for traditional owners. These proposals will allow for the grant of Aboriginal freehold land in accordance with the Cape York Peninsula Tenure Resolution Program, enabling traditional owners to negotiate ongoing use of the site for telecommunications, infrastructure and services purposes. The land is a component of the larger Thayanaku dealing located on the north-east coast of the Cape York Peninsula. It covers an area approximately 384,290 hectares and comprises the Jardine River National Park, the Jardine River Resources Reserve, the Heathlands Resources Reserve and the Denham Group National Park.

This land is part of the groundbreaking Cape York Peninsula Tenure Resolution Program which has so far returned more than 3.5 million hectares on Cape York Peninsula to Aboriginal ownership. On 17 May in Cairns I was so proud and privileged to be present for the historical ceremony that handed the Bromley land back to traditional owners in those three groups on the cape. It was an area that was earmarked some 30-odd years ago for a space station.

These revocations will enable the subsequent transfer of Aboriginal freehold land under the Aboriginal Land Act 1992, dedication of roads under the Land Act 1994, creation of national parks—Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal land—and nature refuges under the Nature Conservation Act 1992. These resources reserves have evidence of considerable cultural importance such as ancient middens, grinding stones and camping places. Clan groups have a strong spiritual connection to the land. They still walk on these places where their ancestors hunted and fished thousands of years ago. These revocations for consideration today are part of the formal steps the Palaszczuk government is taking in upholding a long-held pledge by successive Labor governments to return land to its traditional custodians—a practice, as I understand it, that only occurs to this extent in Queensland.

These lands also have significant natural values and are visited by thousands of people each year. The revocations before the parliament will not impact on existing visitor sites run by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. Visitor sites such as Fruit Bat Falls and Captain Billy's Landing will remain available to all to access. The traditional owners of the areas are keen to develop and enhance tourism and visitor services so that they can share their country with visitors and develop economic opportunities while returning to country themselves.

The Cape York Peninsula Tenure Resolution Program reverses the trend since settlement when governments past took land from traditional owners. It impacted on the ability of traditional owners to access and manage the land—their ability to live on and conduct business on the land. Approving this revocation will put over 40,400 hectares of land back into the hands of those traditional owners. This includes land on the coast where clan groups propose to set up their own camping and tour businesses. They want to share their country and their cultural values with visitors. Other land included in this

revocation is immediately adjacent to the iconic Old Telegraph Track. Traditional owners want to set up a complementary business near this track to support travellers using Gunshot Creek Crossing. No doubt four-wheel drive enthusiasts who know this crossing would agree a vehicle recovery business may present an economic opportunity for traditional owners.

The revocations also open up the ability for traditional owners to permanently live on this land. Digressing slightly, yesterday in the budget we announced an additional 25 Indigenous rangers, certainly a step forward in terms of what will be suitable in parts of this area and, no doubt, any other place throughout Queensland. I met some of the rangers after the most recent cyclone in the north. They do a sterling job for our national parks.

This is important for senior clan members who carry the stories of their parents and grandparents living on the lands which are currently part of the state's parks or reserves. Today this parliament has the opportunity to continue the important land hand-back process for the people of the far northern Cape York Peninsula. Traditional owners have native title determination and also deserve to hold the land title deeds. I am honoured to be the minister responsible for the Cape York Peninsula Tenure Resolution Program and to support the revocation of these areas. I understand that negotiations and work are underway for a ceremony to be held later this year and I look forward to assisting the traditional owners with that important event. I would like to put on record that Ross McLeod from the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships continues to do a sterling job in this area and delivers well not only for Queenslanders but also traditional owners. As the minister, I am so privileged and proud to support this motion tonight.