



Speech By
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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Townsville Electorate, Tourism

 **Mr STEWART** (Townsville—ALP) (2.52 pm): When you talk about Townsville the average person thinks about industry, the North Queensland Cowboys and the new stadium that the Palaszczuk government is building, but the word tourism is gracing the lips of many as we welcome more cruise ships into our great city. There is no doubt that the tourism industry in Townsville struggles a bit because of the geographical disadvantage it suffers. To the north is the internationally recognised Cairns region, which boasts that it is 'where the reef meets the rainforest', and what a beautiful location it is. To the south are the glorious Whitsunday islands that sparkle in the blue waters of the Coral Sea. Is it any wonder that visitors to North Queensland are spoiled for choice when it comes to destinations? As a result, competition for the impressive tourism dollar is very difficult for Townsville.

Townsville is perhaps the best kept secret on the Queensland coastline. Many international backpackers come to Townsville. They specifically go to Magnetic Island to have downtime from the heavily commercialised tourism industry that operates to the north and south. This option too resonates with travellers from interstate. Many visitors to the region lead hectic and very busy lives and are looking for that relaxed holiday escape that they experience on Maggie, but there has been a lot of work behind the scenes to attract the white ships to our region.

Townsville is emerging as the powerhouse of Queensland's tourism boom. New figures show that the city is amongst the fastest growing cruise destinations in our country. In a recent press release Kate Jones, the Minister for Tourism Industry Development, said that Townsville is set to welcome 19 cruise ships in 2019, notching up an impressive 162 per cent growth in visits in just three years. When I look back at figures over that particular time, I see that in 2012-13 Townsville welcomed four cruise ships; the following year it welcomed nine; in 2014-15 there were four cruise ships; and the year after that there were three. We are starting to grow the industry and we are starting to make it happen in Townsville.

The minister went on to say, 'Townsville is one of the most sought after holiday destinations on the planet, so it is not surprising that we are seeing a spike in interest in the cruise industry.' To steal the minister's words, it is safe to say that in the next couple of years Townsville will play a leading role in the state's cruise boom, which was worth \$1.1 billion to the Queensland economy in 2016-17 and supported 4,330 jobs. Why would you not come and visit Townsville? Its leading role in the state's cruise boom was no accident, with the city taking a strategic approach to put the visitor first and plan for the future. Townsville Enterprise Ltd spent time with tourism operators developing a unique experience for visitors, which seems to be exactly what the market demands.

When it comes to tourism the Palaszczuk government has firmly set its agenda to be the best in Australia. Townsville is set to capitalise on its position as a leading cruise ship destination, with the Port of Townsville planning a \$520 million project to deepen and widen the port access channel over the next five years to attract even larger white cruise ships. The Palaszczuk government has committed

\$75 million to this project, which will enable the city to welcome larger vessels that want to come to northern waters, but we cannot do this on our own. We need the Turnbull government to commit its fair share of \$75 million to deepen and widen the channel to allow these larger ships access to our port at berth 10, which is worth \$86 million to redevelop.

It does not stop there when visitors come to Townsville. The Townsville airport recently released its inbound travel figures and they show a dramatic improvement. In January passenger growth was up 8.9 per cent to 128,906 people, which is a new record for the airport with the fourth consecutive month of growth. At a recent meeting with Townsville Airport CEO Mr Kevin Gill I asked him what he attributed the growth to. I asked, 'Where are the people coming from?' He simply said, 'They are coming from Melbourne due to Tigerair.'