



Speech By  
**Michael Healy**


**MEMBER FOR CAIRNS**

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**MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST**

**Indigenous Tourism**

 **Mr HEALY** (Cairns—ALP) (2.39 pm): One of the first appearances I have made as Assistant Minister for Tourism Industry Development was in my own electorate of Cairns where, along with Minister Hinchliffe, I recently visited the Saltwater Club to announce that they were the recipients of funding from the Palaszczuk government's Growing Indigenous Tourism in Queensland Fund. The Saltwater Club is unique as it is the only organisation preserving and promoting the Indigenous maritime heritage of Far North Queensland and employing, engaging and empowering First Nation people throughout the region. It has partnered with more than eight separate traditional owner groups between Cairns and the Torres Strait.

Blackbird International Ltd was established as a community program in 2003 reconnecting Australian descendants of South Sea islanders recruited and blackbirded with their relatives throughout the Pacific. Blackbird developed a number of community initiatives including Saving Torres Strait Pearls, Finding Family Blong Yumi, Blackbird Adventures and the Saltwater Club.

The Saltwater Club is a social enterprise of directors Sonia Minniecon and Mike Smith. The Saltwater Club will assist with branding and sales with a focus on adventure ecotourism for major events and extended voyages throughout Cape York, the Torres Strait and the South Pacific, connecting the paths of blackbirding, 'Coming of the Light', early explorers and resource raiders.

Last year, 2020, was the Year of Indigenous Tourism, and during 2020 the Saltwater Club partnered with Blackbird International to launch the iconic saltwater based Indigenous maritime cultural heritage ecotourism brand the Pearl Lugger Heritage Fleet. They have been steadily restoring culturally and historically significant vessels including pearling luggers, missionary vessels and outrigger canoes and will be the only Indigenous maritime cultural heritage tourism business in Tropical North Queensland, providing a new tourism product to market.

Although tourism will provide the core of economic viability of the project, they have identified other commercial uses that are under development including sea-country engagement for reef management and Indigenous ranger programs; responsibilities at cultural activities, events and festival and re-enactments; and the introduction of carbon neutral, traditional sail transport options to Indigenous communities, councils and organisations.

The fleet currently comprise three historic pearling luggers. With the \$950,000 from the Growing Indigenous Tourism in Queensland Fund, the club has purchased a 90-foot tall ship, the *Derwent Hunter*, which will become the mothership of the fleet being similar to the pearling and blackbirding schooners of the late 1800s. The tall ship will be sailed from Brisbane to Cairns in coming weeks to kick off Saltwater Club tours in the Far North, sailed by full Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander crew.

It will allow visitors and locals alike to step aboard historic pearling luggers, tall ships and traditional outrigger canoes crewed by First Nation people and experience firsthand what it was like to sail on these vessels 150 years ago. Visitors will be able to hoist the sails and hear the tales of Far North Queensland's maritime frontier. The Saltwater Club is more than a new tourism enterprise; it is also a place where young First Nation trainees will learn new skills in ship building and restoration.

Once fully operational by the middle of this year, the Saltwater Club will deliver 19 direct jobs for First Nation workers. The benefits of this enterprise are expected to be far reaching, with work for up to and in excess of 40 Cairns businesses, suppliers and contractors. I can say that in these current times that would be enormously appreciated. This is a win for jobs, it is a win for the diversity of tourism experiences in the Far North and, as I have said, it adds to the product range.

The Palaszczuk government is committed to working with the tourism industry to create new opportunities for growth. The global pandemic has seen tourism hit hard, particularly in my region in Cairns, but our strong health response means we are able to get on with delivering jobs for Queensland's economic recovery. The Palaszczuk government's budget is putting \$74 million into backing tourism and rebuilding better for the future. Indigenous tourism is crucial to Queensland's diversity when it comes to delivering an international and domestic product.