




Speech By
Hon. Scott Stewart

MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

Record of Proceedings, 30 November 2023

TRANSPORT AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE REPORT,

Motion to Take Note

 **Hon. SJ STEWART** (Townsville—ALP) (Minister for Resources) (3.42 pm): I rise to speak to the Transport and Resources Committee's inquiry into the economic and regulatory frameworks for Queensland's island resorts. We know these assets are well loved by all Queenslanders. Our islands are natural assets that we want Queenslanders to be able to enjoy as part of our great lifestyle. As a government we are committed to the responsible development of our island resorts for the jobs and business opportunities they create in regional Queensland.

On 16 June this year I tabled the government's response to the committee's recommendations. The government's response supports seven of the committee's recommendations, supports nine recommendations in principle and does not support two recommendations. Non-performing tourism resorts leases were brought to my attention almost the moment I was appointed as the Minister for Resources. The Department of Resources continues to work with lessees and key stakeholders to facilitate redevelopment and rejuvenate our island resorts. Work was well and truly underway by my department to look at non-operational island resort leases before this inquiry began.

My department has been taking action, despite what those opposite might have you believe. Staff have been out in the field auditing a number of non-operational island resorts. The audits have provided a detailed understanding of the level of compliance and development on the islands and the condition of the infrastructure and land. We will continue this work and I expect action will be taken when appropriate.

My preference is always that the department work collaboratively with leaseholders to ensure compliance with their conditions. That is a huge task, with more than 18,000 leases across our state, including many cattle and primary producing leases that many of those opposite would be aware of. I take into account what the member for Gregory said but I will issue this bit of advice: be careful what you wish for. If we apply the use it or lose it approach, that would also apply to pastoral leases, and I can say that there are many around the state that are noncompliant. We are working with those stakeholders to make sure they can become compliant.

Where it is needed, strong action will be taken and other island leaseholders who are noncompliant with their lease conditions may, subject to natural justice requirements, be subject to forfeiture action. For the benefit of the House, this has already happened. In April this year the leases held by Great Keppel Island Holdings—a subsidiary of Tower Holdings—were revoked. This was done because the lessee of Great Keppel Island had not met its financial obligations with respect to the leases, which is why action was taken. I know the member for Keppel welcomed this action.

As a government, we have also commenced action in the Land Court seeking the forfeiture of Double Island near Cairns. An application was filed in October with the Land Court to commence forfeiture action against the operators of Double Island off the Far North Queensland coast. The lessee,

Fortune Island Holding Company, was notified earlier this year of the Queensland government's intention to begin forfeiture action. This is a prized asset which I know the member for Barron River and the member for Cairns, as well as the community, want to see open to the public. That work is continuing and is important. Further, the committee's report has sharpened the focus of the agency on compliance for non-operating island resorts, with compliance audits and further compliance measures commencing. I will say this too: these resorts are operated by private investors and not the Queensland government.

We know Queensland is one of the best destinations in the world, and we want people to be able to experience that. Ensuring the right experiences are available as holiday-makers' tastes change is important too. The priority is to work with lessees and key stakeholders to facilitate redevelopment and rejuvenate island resorts in the Great Barrier Reef so the burden is not left to the taxpayer. We will continue to support the development of our islands for the great lifestyle they support.