




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BONNEY

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PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT

Far North Queensland, Tourism

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (2.25 pm): Many tourism operators in Far North Queensland are still struggling in the wake of severe Tropical Cyclone Jasper. A couple of weeks ago our brilliant Barron River candidate, Bree James, hosted me for a round table with some of these small businesses at the Cairns Adventure Group headquarters. I want to acknowledge Bree and our Cairns candidate, Yolonde, who are in the gallery today. They raised access and infrastructure issues in the Barron Gorge and Daintree national parks and their desire for permits to be waived while they are doing it tough.

The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service needs to prioritise the repair and reopening of infrastructure in these national parks. Operators told me the QPWS has not even fully assessed these areas. In a further blow, they were verbally told it would be four to five years before full repairs would be able to secure funding. In particular, the popular Jindalba loop in the Cape Tribulation section of the Daintree National Park, which was closed even before Jasper, could remain closed for another 12 to 18 months.

I ask the environment minister: will the government prioritise repairs to this vital infrastructure in some of our most highly visited national parks? The state government must also consider waiving national park permit fees for struggling tourist businesses that operate in these areas for at least six to 12 months. Marine tourism operators got marina fee relief, but these land-based operators have had nothing. Visitor numbers are down, they are hurting and they need support.

I met with Advance Cairns yesterday and there is still no progress on this. What is the point of having a tourism minister based in Cairns if he cannot get his colleague in environment to take pressure off local operators? These ecotourism operators also told me of their frustrations with wait times. It takes weeks to get pre-permit amendment meetings done with the department and then it is another two to six months just to get an answer. For new applications for permits, it can take even longer.

Conservation happens through education. We need people to see and experience what is the most biodiverse part of our state to be passionate about protecting it. Visits to these parks can be sustainable and they can be done sensitively to the environment. Genuine partnerships are essential. Tourism operators generate income for the management of this protected estate as well. We need to fix the disconnect between the tourism and environment portfolios.

We need a more customer friendly approach from the state government, especially when it comes to communicating with operators. I would also be interested to see the impacts this natural disaster has had on the Wangetti Trail where I am told huge chasms have opened up in particular sections. This project is already over budget and overdue. I ask both the tourism and environment ministers: what damage assessments have been undertaken, and will even more funding be required to finally finish Wangetti?