

Question on Notice
No. 1383
Asked on Wednesday 1 November 2006

MR WETTENHALL asked the Minister for Local Government, Planning and Sport (MR FRASER)—

QUESTION:

What steps have been taken to implement the Government's election commitment to establish a statutory regional plan for far north Queensland and what is the timeline for completion of the plan and what will be the benefits for far north Queensland upon completion of the plan?

ANSWER:

The Government has moved quickly to implement a recent election commitment to establish a new regional plan for Far North Queensland. On 9 October 2006, I announced funding of \$3.7M for this project to prepare the first regional plan outside of SEQ.

This plan is highly important because of the high population growth in the region, and its unique environment, which includes the Wet Tropics and Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Areas.

In October I visited the Far North Queensland region and met with all the Mayors of local governments participating in developing the new plan. I was pleased by the support the Mayors expressed for the planning process

The Draft Plan will be developed with input from key interest groups particularly councils, environmental and community groups and the development sector. The plan will also draw on existing planning work for the region, including the FNQ 2010 plan and local government planning schemes.

Program establishment and project planning is well underway. The Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation has undertaken a range of preliminary consultation with key stakeholders including:

- A meeting and subsequent workshop with the local government planners in the region;
- A meeting with the current Far North Queensland Regional Plan Implementation Coordination Group comprising State agency and local government representatives; and
- Individual meetings with State agency representatives and other key representative bodies in the region including the Far North Queensland Natural Resource Management Group.

The proposed formal governance and advisory arrangements for the new regional plan are currently being finalised. This will include the establishment of key advisory bodies such as a new Regional Planning Advisory Committee. A community consultation strategy is also being developed.

The project team will be based in Cairns and recruitment for additional project staff has commenced with positions advertised in local, State and national newspapers in mid November.

Preliminary planning work such as population and land supply analysis and constraints mapping has also commenced. The preparation of constraints mapping is a significant part of the project and will identify areas of important environmental and natural resource value. The regulatory component of the plan will then protect areas with significant environmental values from urban encroachment.

I expect to have a Draft Plan out for community consultation by late 2007, with the plan scheduled for completion in late 2008. Legislation supporting the Plan will be prepared and come into force when the Draft Plan is released.

The benefits of a statutory regional plan for far north Queensland include:

- Effective integration and negotiation of local, regional and State priorities into an agreed statutory regional plan;
- An urban footprint over those areas of the Far North that are suitable for urban and residential development. All land outside the urban footprint will be protected from urban development including environmentally sensitive areas and agricultural areas;
- The regional plan will be supported by a dedicated Far North Queensland Infrastructure Plan, which will map out future infrastructure commitments for the region. The urban footprint will be used to guide any decisions on new infrastructure;
- Ongoing development and implementation of sustainable regional development priorities and initiatives in Far North Queensland;
- Opportunities for regional communities to identify their priorities and contribute to decision-making; and
- Improved coordination of service delivery between State agencies and local government.