

Question on Notice
No. 988
Asked on Wednesday 14 October 2015

MR CRAWFORD ASKED THE MINISTER FOR HOUSING AND PUBLIC WORKS AND MINISTER FOR SCIENCE AND INNOVATION (HON L ENOCH) —

Will the Minister outline any new plans for new investment in housing and jobs in remote parts of Far North Queensland?

ANSWER

The Department of Housing and Public Works has a strong history of creating jobs and employment opportunities for Queenslanders. The department has a widespread presence across Queensland and in Far North Queensland, has a regional office located in Cairns which is supported by district offices and depots in Thursday Island, Atherton, Innisfail, Kowanyama, Bamaga, Mareeba and Weipa.

The department, through Building and Asset Services (BAS), procures and contract manages building works and maintenance services for government-owned facilities, including schools, hospitals and police stations. BAS engages 1,337 registered contractors in Far North Queensland to carry out this work, thereby contributing to job growth in the region.

The Department of Housing and Public Works is also committed to supporting a range of social and economic priorities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities through the effective delivery of housing and construction activities. Initiatives supporting economic growth include the enhancement and development of skills and expertise within communities.

The department implements the *Queensland Building and Construction Training Policy* (Training Policy) in all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities. The Training Policy incorporates the Indigenous Economic Opportunities Plan (IEOP), which has the primary objective of maximising employment and enterprise opportunities for local businesses.

The Training Policy provides a structured approach to assuring local input on new housing construction projects both in terms of employing locals and using local businesses while in the community for the duration of the construction works and has a core requirement that a minimum of 10% of the total labour hours on eligible projects be undertaken by apprentices and/or trainees and through other workforce training.

The Training Policy requires that an additional amount, equivalent to a further 10% of the total labour hours, be allocated towards an agreed IEOP. If a project is delivered in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island community, it is a priority that the requirements of the Training Policy be met by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island apprentices and trainees and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island workers.

Through Government Employee Housing (GEH), the department will commence delivery of 33 new units of accommodation for employee housing in Far North Queensland. A capital construction program totalling approximately \$21 million will fund three separate projects on Thursday Island. The projects include a multi-unit development providing 14 one-bedroom units at 56 Victoria Parade, 16 two-bedroom units and two three-bedroom houses at 62 Victoria Parade plus a four-bedroom house located at 31 Loban Road, Thursday Island.

In 2015-16, GEH also plans to spend approximately \$10.6 million in Far North Queensland to address identified maintenance activities across 454 existing owned residences. An additional \$2.3 million has been approved to upgrade 189 government employee residences within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities. Proposed works include activities such as full bathroom and kitchen replacements, provision of cupboards and storage, built-in wardrobes and laundry upgrades.

Not only do these initiatives have direct employment benefits, they also enhance government's capacity to attract and retain skilled staff to support delivery of important government services.

Through the Department of Science, Information Technology and Innovation, the Queensland Government's Advance Queensland Startup Queensland Fund has provided assistance to a number of entrepreneurial workshops in Far North Queensland, which will lead to the creation of jobs of the future. In conjunction with the Cook Shire Council, the Tablelands Regional Council and the Cassowary Coast Regional Council, theSPACE Cairns held *Building a Startup Ecosystem workshops and Agile Business Planning* workshops in Cooktown on 29 August, Atherton on 1 September and Innisfail on 4 September 2015. The aim of these workshops was to help startup business founders to develop their ideas into a commercial venture and provide them with the skills to grow a business and create employment opportunities.

The workshops were part of theSPACE's *Developing Regional Micro Startup Ecosystems* project which received \$13,000 under the Startup Queensland Fund.

The Queensland Government is also creating jobs of the future in Far North Queensland by supporting Startup Weekends to be held in the region. These community led events challenge participants to present their ideas, develop a business model, produce a prototype and launch a product or service in 54 hours.

The Startup Queensland Fund has provided \$5,000 to theSPACE Cairns to host a Startup Weekend in Cairns from 13-15 November 2015. I am pleased to say the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships will be sponsoring members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Far North Queensland to participate in this event.

The Palaszczuk Government is also committed to providing housing and homelessness services in Far North Queensland through its Housing Service Centres located in Cairns and Thursday Island. This government understands that housing is an important foundation for a person to achieve other vital outcomes such as quality health and education, and strong employment opportunities. In 2015-16, the Department of Housing and Public Works is providing Housing and Homelessness services to Far North Queensland through a number of measures, including:

- \$149.4 million in capital funding for social housing including:
 - new construction
 - purchase of existing homes and land
 - property upgrades (includes major refurbishment activities of a capital nature to kitchens, bathrooms, laundries and new fencing; disability modifications for people with specific needs; and installation of new products to improve amenity and security such as insulation to ceilings and walls and security screening).
- \$42.9 million in maintenance for social housing including:
 - responsive repairs to rectify breakdown of components and incidental damage resulting from storm, flood, cyclone and fire or termite damage
 - planned maintenance, inclusive of cyclical statutory and mandatory services, internal and external painting and replacement of “like for like” property elements such as floor coverings and fencing, where already existing.
 - property maintenance to restore vacant dwellings for new tenants.
- \$25.6 million in Housing and Homelessness services, for example:
 - accommodation and support to people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness (Specialist Homelessness Services)
 - support eligible people to remain living in their home by providing critical home maintenance and addressing safety issues (Home Assist Secure)
 - provision of transitional housing to eligible social housing applicants (Community Rent Scheme)
 - private market assistance including bond loans, RentConnect and National Rental Affordability Scheme.

*For the purpose of this response, Far North Queensland is described as the electorates of Barron River, Cairns, Cook, and Mulgrave.