



Speech by

**Andrew Cripps**

**MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK**

Hansard Wednesday, 27 August 2008

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## **APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL**

**Mr CRIPPS** (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (12.18 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the report of Estimates Committee A. During the Estimates Committee A hearing the issue of the draft Far North Queensland 2025 Regional Plan was discussed by both the Premier and the Deputy Premier. Soon after the draft FNQ 2025 plan was launched in Cairns on 9 May this year by the Premier and the Deputy Premier, I spoke in this parliament about the concerns held by a number of stakeholders in far-north Queensland even at that early stage. They had reservations about how the draft plan was put together and how it would affect their communities. The Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils expressed concerns about how the document was drafted, stating that the final draft plan lacked details about project planning processes and described the way in which the draft plan was written as an 'on-the-run approach'. The FNQROC also stated that the advisory panels that considered various aspects of the draft plan were formed as a result of a rushed process that was required to meet tight time frames without appropriate administrative support.

The FNQ 2025 plan was launched in Cairns amid a great deal of staged fanfare, but not everybody in far-north Queensland shares the enthusiasm of the government for this document and what it proposes for the area that it will be imposed upon, including the part of my electorate within the Cassowary Coast Regional Council. Concerns expressed earlier about the drafting of this document have become more serious, widespread and proven to be justified as the provisions of this proposed statutory planning instrument have become better understood.

There is a significant alarm in respect of the maps that have been issued with the draft 2025 plan. Some examples of the more serious errors include the Cairns International Airport, the Paradise Palms and Novotel developments at Palm Beach, urban areas around the suburb of Smithfield and Stocklands shopping centre being mapped as good quality agricultural land. These fundamental errors have undermined the confidence of many stakeholders in the accuracy of not only the maps but the policy decisions that have been made and incorporated into the draft plan on the basis of and with reference to these maps.

Stakeholders in the rural sector have been shocked by the release in early July of draft policy regulations and extensive mapping by the Environmental Protection Agency providing for vast tracts of land to be declared as part of the FNQ 2025 plan as areas of ecological significance under a variety of categories, including conservation corridors, priority rehabilitation areas, wetlands and terrestrial areas of high or general ecological significance. These maps were inadequate for effective consultation as far as their level of detail was concerned. Replacement maps were not provided until early August.

In the first instance, this proposal is objectionable on the basis that the draft EPA regulatory provisions and maps to create these areas of ecological significance were not available until July 2008 and the normal 60 business days consultation period has not been provided for. This is not acceptable. While rural stakeholders have had a limited opportunity to scrutinise these regulatory provisions and maps developed and released after the rest of the draft FNQ 2025 plan, the general public has been deprived of this opportunity. The draft areas of ecological significance regulatory provisions and maps were not included in the draft FNQ 2025 plan document released in May.

The areas of ecological significance in the rural landscape and production areas, as defined by the draft FNQ 2025 plan, are an ambit claim by the EPA to secure control over private land, purportedly for environmental reasons, without any prior consultation with landowners and without any suggestion of compensation. There are already reports in the area covered by the draft FNQ 2025 plan that property values have decreased where the title is affected by the areas of ecological significance mapping. It is also unclear in precisely what circumstances the areas of ecological significance regulatory provisions will be triggered.

In terms of how the FNQ 2025 will affect far-north Queenslanders in towns and suburbs of larger centres, many local communities have expressed concerns about the proposed increases in urban densities. In my electorate of Hinchinbrook, for example, the draft FNQ 2025 plan proposes that residential densities more than double in townships like Tully, Cardwell and Mission Beach, while townships like Innisfail, Mourilyan, Kurrimine Beach and South Johnstone are also proposed to double.

People come to far-north Queensland to move away from urban densities of that nature. The FNQ 2025 plan limits the supply of residential land within mapped defined urban zones. Densities, as a result, ultimately will be achieved by the creation of smaller lots or providing for multistorey buildings. Residents do not want to see far-north Queensland's unique character permanently altered by this inflexible, poorly drafted statutory plan. The state government has presented a flawed planning proposal to the people of far-north Queensland. It ought to withdraw the plan and it ought to go back to the drawing board.