



Speech by

**Andrew Cripps**

**MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK**

Hansard Thursday, 28 August 2008

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

**Mr CRIPPS** (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (3.37 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the report of Estimates Committee F in relation to the Sustainability, Climate Change and Innovation portfolio. I wish to discuss the Ma:Mu canopy walk near Innisfail in the Wooroonooran National Park, which was discussed by the committee. This facility was opened last Sunday, 24 August, and I was very pleased to attend the opening. It was a positive day for the Wet Tropics, which now has an additional tourist attraction of a very high standard that will make far-north Queensland an even more attractive destination to visit for central and southern Queenslanders, visitors from other states and of course international visitors.

The Ma:Mu canopy walk is an approximately 2.5-kilometre round trip, which includes a 37-metre high elevated viewing tower which provides spectacular views of the surrounding rainforest. Like everyone else who attended the official opening of the Ma:Mu canopy walk last Sunday, I was tremendously impressed with both the canopy walk itself and the attached interpretive facilities. Certainly, the Ma:Mu canopy walk was praised by the Premier and the Minister for Sustainability, Climate Change and Innovation as an excellent collaboration between the state government through the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service division of the Environmental Protection Agency, the Ma:Mu traditional owners and tourism operators who will be keen to promote the facility as an attraction.

The year 2008 marks 100 years since the declaration of Queensland's first national park, an area which is now a part of Tamborine National Park in the Gold Coast Hinterland. Eight out of every 10 Queenslanders visit a national park at least once a year. Four out of every 10 Queenslanders visit national parks regularly. As far as Queensland's tourism industry is concerned, Queensland's national parks are visited by two million international visitors every year.

I was very pleased to attend local celebrations of the 100th anniversary of national parks in Queensland at the Reef and Rainforest Information Centre at Cardwell on 14 June in my electorate of Hinchinbrook. Indeed, in my electorate of Hinchinbrook, we have a very significant area of declared national park protecting some of the most spectacular natural attractions in Queensland. Almost two-thirds of the Hinchinbrook electorate is made up of state controlled land, declared World Heritage, national park or state forest.

An announcement by the state government in March this year to expand the size of the national park estate in Queensland by 50 per cent by 2020 was done to coincide with the 100th anniversary of Queensland's first national park being declared. An increase in the national park estate from 7.6 million hectares to approximately 12 million hectares by 2020 must be accompanied by a significant increase in funding and resources to preserve their strong environmental and conservation values.

I have been a critic of the management of north Queensland and far-north Queensland national parks by the state government, particularly in relation to the control of feral animal numbers and the proliferation of pest weeds. I certainly stand by those criticisms and will continue to push for extra resources to maintain the conservation values of our national parks. I feel the state government has struggled to provide the QPWS with adequate funding and resources to manage the existing national park estate, let alone a 50 per cent increase in area over the next 12 years.

At the opening of the Ma:Mu canopy walk, Mr Daniel Gschwind, the chief executive officer of the Queensland Tourism Industry Council, was full of praise for the Ma:Mu canopy walk initiative, particularly in relation to the collaborative partnership between local stakeholders and the strategic importance of making even better use of national parks as tourist attractions that promote the region and its environment. Mr Gschwind also said quite clearly that he felt Queensland had not taken the opportunity over the last 10 years to pursue more of these types of projects in collaboration with the tourism industry where the public could be provided with better access to national parks in a controlled way. He said that he hoped the Ma:Mu canopy walk project signalled an intention by the state government to pursue more of these types of projects at appropriate locations across Queensland. I certainly agree with Mr Gschwind.

A perfect candidate for another environmentally sustainable project in north Queensland that has already been canvassed with this state government is the development of eco-friendly accommodation at Wallaman Falls west of Ingham. This is a major tourist attraction in its own right—it is the largest single-drop waterfall in Australia at approximately 268 metres—but it is also a vital link in the World Heritage Misty Mountains walking tracks. The Hinchinbrook Shire Council has pushed for this eco-friendly accommodation at Wallaman Falls as part of its efforts to diversify the economy of the Herbert River district in an environmentally sustainable fashion. It is an excellent idea that I strongly support. I call on the minister to seriously consider this proposal. It has the potential to be as successful as the Ma:Mu project and would further enhance the reputation of national parks in north Queensland.