



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Main Committee**

**CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS**

**Leichhardt Electorate: Far North Queensland**

**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 31 May 2011**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Tuesday, 31 May 2011  
**Page** 5387  
**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Entsch, Warren, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr ENTSCHE** (Leichhardt—Chief Opposition Whip) (16:28): It has been widely reported that the far northern economy is in a very bad way at present and we are in desperate need of government support. The Far North, unfortunately, boasts some very alarming statistics. It has the highest unemployment in the country and over 400 businesses have closed their doors in the past two years alone. There is also a lot of commentary about doom and gloom in our region, but there is also a lot of positive talk from people who live and work in our community. Business and industry leaders have collectively worked on plans to rebuild our region in earnest and they need to be commended for their efforts. The reality is that the Far North's economic woes could be fixed overnight if the government committed to some of the initiatives that have been identified by our local experts as priorities.

For a start we need to extend the entitlements of Cyclone Yasi's disaster relief under the NDRRA to include all businesses affected by the event in Cairns, Daintree Coast, Cooktown and Cape York and review the eligibility criteria so businesses can actually access support. We are coming from a very low base with over 13 per cent unemployment only a few months ago and businesses are screaming for support. This is an important short-term measure that will allow businesses to continue to trade and start to rebuild and recover. We also need to give businesses tax relief that they desperately need. Businesses are not looking to get out of paying their tax debts; they just need more time to pay until cash flows get back to normal levels. We also need a commitment to start immediately on the full upgrading of the Bruce Highway. We need the government to start this commitment to fix the highway once and for all. That is desperately needed. They do not need to allocate all of the funds but they do need to start now and not in three years' time. Ensuring that the projects are carried out by local businesses is also a very important part of the commitment.

A commitment to establish a seed fund for the sports, performing arts and cultural initiatives that will see the development of a tropical campus for the Australian Institute of Sport in Far North Queensland is desperately needed. We need to commit funding for the first stage of the Australian National Institute of Tropical Health and Medicine. We also need an appropriate all-weather bridge at the Bloomfield River crossing and some strategic work done at the Peninsula Development Road.

The Port Douglas lagoon will also help that region. It is desperately needed and a commitment would help there. I cannot see why the government does not commit to some of these initiatives today. Why can't the government listen to our business and industry leaders' calls for assistance? The commencement of even a few of these projects would resurrect our economy, create employment and, most importantly, put a spring in people's steps once again. I call on the government to listen to the people of Far North Queensland and to give us that support that we need to rebuild instead of neglecting us in favour of other electorates that have more political benefit.