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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Federation Chamber**

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

**Development of Northern Australia**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 2 March 2015**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Speaker** Christensen, George, MP

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**Mr CHRISTENSEN** (Dawson—The Nationals Deputy Whip) (11:50): Madam Deputy Speaker Landry, I am pleased to speak on this motion with you in the chair, as a fellow northern Australian. As a fellow north Queenslander from above the Tropic of Capricorn, you know all too well the benefits of living in northern Australia but also the challenges at the moment. Certainly your electorate of Capricornia is facing some very big challenges with Cyclone Marcia crossing the coast, and you have been a tower of strength for that community.

That said, I was fortunate enough to take part in the inquiry into the development of northern Australia and had the opportunity to see much of Australia beyond the beautiful coastal strip of north Queensland that I call home. My electorate of Dawson is some 400 kilometres long, stretching from Mackay to Townsville. During that inquiry I saw the potential just waiting to happen. The chairman of that inquiry, beside me, the member for Leichhardt, definitely saw the potential. There was a lot of potential. The top half of Australia is home to about four per cent of our population, yet it is home to a wealth of resources and opportunities—land, water, minerals, sunshine, beaches and islands, fisheries and people who are not afraid to work hard for a living.

While our proximity to Asia might not make us a super food bowl, it does provide enormous opportunities for agriculture, for tourism, for exports and for trade. We have some of the largest reserves of some of the best and cleanest coal in the world, which could be used to provide electricity to millions of the world's poorest people for the first time. Doing so would also provide enormous wealth to this country through royalties, company tax, and income tax paid on behalf of thousands of people who could be employed in delivering our natural resources to the world. Thousands of jobs and hundreds of businesses hang in the balance in north Queensland now, because the Labor Party is too busy pandering to extreme greens to worry about the people they are supposed to represent—and that is, the worker, or in this case the out-of-worker.

But there are other key industries that need to be encouraged and developed. The Liberal-National government is already implementing policy in these areas and the upcoming white paper will identify priority projects and policies that will bring about the best results for little or no cost. This government has already proven a willingness and desire to invest in infrastructure that counts, spending money and creating jobs in the production of assets that will deliver for the economy and deliver for Australia and northern Australia.

I can point to the \$6.7 billion investment that we will be making over a 10-year period in the Bruce Highway, which is the lifeblood of north Queensland. I know the member for Kennedy is very passionate about that as well, as is the member for Herbert and the member for Leichhardt. We all agree that that money needs to go there. Already work has begun on a number of projects.

The planning and detailed design of the Mackay Ring Road is well underway and we hope to see the construction of that commencing in 2016-17. Another important infrastructure area for North Queensland is the mobile phone network, where black spots present safety and productivity issues. The government's Mobile Black Spot Program is working with industry to secure the best value for money for taxpayers in addressing high-priority network black spots.

As we know, the north sees very little rain during the dry season, but during the wet it really rains. So new infrastructure in the form of dams would provide a steady, reliable source of water for resources, agriculture and communities. I point to the Urannah dam project, on the doorstep of my electorate—in your electorate, in fact, Madam Deputy Speaker—which would open up an area of greenfield irrigation development only 100 kilometres from existing agriculture: the sugar industry of the Burdekin to the north and the horticultural industry of Bowen to the south.

Construction of a dam is a long-term project, so Urannah is not a project to solve the immediate problems of unemployment experienced in the town of Bowen. Labor and the Greens getting out of the way of job-creating projects like Abbot Point and the Galilee Basin is the best way to do that. But the long-term future of Bowen

could be secured through Urannah and also through the extension of the Elliot Main Channel, which is partly constructed already. The Elliot Main Channel is partly built and is designed to transport 60,000 megalitres of water from the Burdekin through 93 kilometres of open channel and then 63 kilometres of pipeline.

There is more to the north than agriculture. Tourism is one aspect. I have to congratulate the member for Herbert for the efforts that he has made to secure government funding to deliver international flights into Townsville airport. For my part, I am working on tourism in the Whitsundays, trying to remove some of the crazy regulations on taxation, duties and the environment that we have in relation to super yachts coming into the Whitsundays. If we could get them there it would drive in \$50,000 every week for every superyacht that is docked in the port. That would mean jobs—jobs for that community. We have to get northern Australia booming; it is vitally important.