

# SPEECH



**Jim Turnour MP**  
**Federal Member for Leichhardt**

**3 February 2009**

## **ADJOURNMENT - Cairns Taipans**

**Mr TURNOUR** (Leichhardt) (8:40 PM) — I rise tonight to lend my support to the Cairns Taipans, a team celebrating its 10th year in the National Basketball League and a team fighting for survival beyond this season as it went into voluntary administration late last year and has since been placed into liquidation. It now needs to find a new owner to stay a part of the new league.

It is a team worth supporting, and I am encouraging the local community to get behind an effort led by Cairns Basketball president, Denis Donaghy, and general manager, Michael Scott, to establish the Taipans as a community owned team. They are asking local business and community members to become foundation members of the new club by pledging \$5,000 towards a new community owned franchise. Syndicates are being formed where people cannot afford the \$5,000 individually. The team needs at least 100 members to raise the \$500,000 in operating capital required by Basketball Australia to become part of a new national basketball league that is being established this year.

The Taipans launched the membership drive last week and I am pleased to report that, as of tonight, they have secured 73 written pledges. They are in negotiations with a third party to secure the \$1 million bank guarantee necessary to meet the other requirements of Basketball Australia to continue in the league. I am proud to say that I have committed \$5,000 to become a foundation member. The Taipans are worth saving, and the community based model, I believe, is the best chance of ensuring that they have a long-term future in Cairns. They are Cairns's only national team and, if we lose them, it will be some time, if ever, before we get back a national team. The benefits of having a national team go beyond basketball, with an elite team building local community spirit, providing role models for aspiring young people and promoting Cairns nationally through the free media exposure.

A number of young men from the tropical north have gained a foothold in professional basketball because of the Taipans, the most famous being Nathan Jawai, a young Indigenous man who is now playing for the Toronto Raptors in the United States NBA, the world's premier competition. Mr Jawai probably would not be in the United States playing basketball if it were not for the Taipans. And he is a boy from Bamaga!

Cairns Basketball has a track record of supporting young people from disadvantaged backgrounds get into basketball through programs like Hoop Dreaming. This free program, which runs from 9 pm to 12 midnight on Friday evenings, gives youth an opportunity to engage in recreational activities and games associated with basketball in a supervised, safe and drug-

alcohol- and tobacco-free environment. Basketball is an ideal sport for the tropics as it can be played indoors during hot and wet conditions, supporting healthy lifestyles for people of all ages.

Having an elite national team like the Cairns Taipans only helps promote the sport locally and provide role models for young people. Aaron Grabau, a foundation player who recently played his 300th game for the Taipans, is a shining example. He was recently named Cairns regional council's Senior Sports person of the Year at the Australia Day Awards and is an exemplary role model in our local community.

The Taipans also bring indirect benefits to the local business community. Game nights bring people out to the Cairns Convention Centre, who then go out and celebrate in the city. Travelling teams and fans also stay in local hotels, and I expect some of these fans stay on and experience the Great Barrier Reef and Wet Tropics tourism icons.

The NBL is covered in the national media, exposing Cairns as a tourism destination that can only bring benefits to the Cairns economy. The new league will see Fox Sports televising all games. So there are plenty of reasons to support the Taipans, not least the great team effort that has been put in by players since the team was put into voluntary administration.

The administrator had to let go the team's high-paid imports and head coach, Alan Black, soon after they went into administration. Led by captain, Martin Cattalini, and new head coach, Mark Beecroft, players have not dropped their bundle but have fought hard and done their best to represent Cairns in the national league. Remaining team members and staff have taken substantial pay cuts to ensure the Taipans can play out the remainder of the season. The atmosphere at home games has been fantastic, even when we have not won. Recent victories over the Sydney Spirit and the Adelaide 36ers have been fantastic nights.

I will continue to do all I can to support the Taipans having a future in the new NBL competition. I have spoken to the Minister for Sport, Kate Ellis, about the efforts already being made in Cairns and also to Basketball Australia to ensure the Taipans are given every chance to be a part of the new league. If we are to be successful, though, the community must get behind this effort by Cairns Basketball to make the Taipans a community owned not-for-profit franchise. As I have already outlined, there are plenty of reasons to support the team.

I have confidence in the model that is being put forward by Cairns Basketball under the leadership of Denis Donaghy, who was part of the group that originally founded the club in Cairns. He has convinced me that the team can be financially sustainable into the future under this community ownership model. I am working hard to encourage others to support the team and doing what I can to ensure that they have a future as part of the new National Basketball League.