



Speech by

Andrew Cripps

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

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CLEAN COAL TECHNOLOGY SPECIAL AGREEMENT BILL; APPROPRIATION BILLS

Mr CRIPPS (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (2.30 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate in reply to the Appropriation Bill as it relates to my electorate of Hinchinbrook. The Beattie government's budget for the financial year 2007-08 sets Queensland on a path into debt. The budget papers reveal that by 2010-11 the Beattie government intends to run up borrowings of \$52 billion which will eventually incur an annual interest repayment of \$1.14 billion. Despite record tax revenues thanks to the GST and increases in state taxes and royalties from the mining industry, the Beattie government has been forced to borrow huge amounts of money, incurring unprecedented levels of debt to fund huge emergency infrastructure projects particularly in south-east Queensland. Think of the extra projects, resources and services that could have been delivered to Queenslanders and Queensland communities across the state with the \$1.14 billion in interest repayments that will need to be made by the state government to service that debt.

The future interest payments could have built new hospitals, provided more resources to and upgraded facilities at schools, employed more police and ambulance officers and given them better resources and facilities. The interest payments could have built new roads and helped to maintain the existing ones which need work. Instead, we will be making interest repayments. The Beattie government has been sitting on the treasury benches in Queensland for nine years, enjoying the revenue benefits of an economic boom delivered by a surge in the mining sector and the strong economic management of the federal coalition government. However, in contrast to the federal coalition government, which through strong economic management has been able to pay off the \$96 billion in debt left behind by the Hawke and Keating Labor governments, the Beattie Labor government has at the same time led Queensland into debt.

In relation to my electorate of Hinchinbrook, there are a number of things announced in the budget which I welcome. The budget has revealed that the overall allocation for the new Ingham Hospital has more than doubled in 12 months from \$22.1 million in 2006-07 to \$44.9 million in 2007-08. This recognises that it is important to ensure that this new hospital, which will undoubtedly be required to service the healthcare needs of the communities in the Herbert River district for many years to come, will have the facilities to deliver those health services.

Stage 1 of the new Ingham Hospital finally began earlier this year. The Beattie government has promised the project for several years and several state elections. The first plan that Queensland Health brought to the table was unacceptable. However, to its credit, Queensland Health listened to the community about the growing needs of the Ingham Hospital, which is increasingly servicing areas north of Cardwell and south of Rollingstone as well as the Herbert River district. The 2007-08 budget shows that \$1.69 million has already been spent to date on the project, with a further \$9 million to be spent by the end of June 2008. The balance of the allocation—some \$34.2 million—is due to be spent beyond June 2008. But despite the doubling of the budget, I understand that Queensland Health still does not plan to have a permanent maternity ward or offer dialysis treatment at the new Ingham Hospital, which is an issue that I have consistently raised with the Minister for Health.

There was a recent announcement from the state government advising that the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme would be boosted from 10c to 15c a kilometre, and I have mentioned this issue on a number of occasions. While this small increase is welcome, it will not make a significant dint in the transport bills being faced by many people in regional areas of Queensland like my electorate who are being forced to travel long distances more often to access an increasing number of healthcare services. The Beattie government has continued to concentrate a larger range of healthcare services in bigger provincial cities like Cairns and Townsville and it is costing these patients dearly. The most harshly affected are those least able to cope with the costs such as the chronically ill, older Queenslanders and others on low and fixed incomes. The announcement did not address the issue of the accommodation subsidy part of the patient travel subsidy scheme which is also inadequate.

I welcome a number of road transport projects which have been earmarked for the Hinchinbrook electorate. There are about \$30 million worth of projects planned which will construct overtaking lanes, turning lanes, improve road surfaces and mitigate the effects of floodwaters on parts of the Bruce Highway. The projects include \$1.5 million for the construction of an overtaking lane between Althaus Creek and Saunders Creek just north of Townsville, \$2 million for the construction of overtaking lanes and turning lanes at Balgal Beach near Rollingstone, \$25 million to upgrade the road and mitigate the impact of floodwaters between Tokalon Road and Lannercost Street at Ingham, and a capital grant of \$1.26 million for the Hinchinbrook Shire Council to seal the road to Mount Fox.

The projects providing turning lanes and overtaking lanes on the Bruce Highway will significantly enhance the flow of traffic and thus the safety on our roads, particularly with the increase in tourism and heavy vehicles on the highway in north Queensland. I would, however, like to see more projects for turning lanes off the Bruce Highway in the Northern Beaches area of Thuringowa City Council between Black River and Bluewater to enhance access for residents living in those communities, and I have raised these projects with the Minister for Transport and Main Roads. There is the issue of the Kirrama Range Road near Kennedy just north of Cardwell which is in a state of disrepair and has actually been closed. This is a significant local road and it is an issue that I have brought to the attention of the Minister for Transport and Main Roads and the Minister for the Environment and Multiculturalism, as the road is located in a national park. It is an ongoing issue. Whilst I acknowledge that the state government has provided some assistance to assess the road to determine what upgrade costs may be faced, I urge the state government to take responsibility for this road given that it does go through a national park and it has strategic importance as far as the tourism industry is concerned.

I also welcome the announcement that there will be investments in boating infrastructure in the electorate of Hinchinbrook. The budget allocates more than \$3 million in funding for the upgrade of recreational boating facilities right across Queensland, including the Mourilyan Harbour boat ramp as well as boating facilities at Toomulla Beach near Rollingstone. Queensland fishermen and boating enthusiasts pay their boat registration fees and their boat trailer registration fees every year, and they deserve to have those payments returned to them in the form of new and upgraded boating infrastructure.

As far as energy infrastructure is concerned, on the one hand I am pleased to see that the Kareeya Power Station has attracted a further allocation of capital works improvements in this budget, up from \$5.6 million in 2006-07 to \$8.2 million in 2007-08. The Kareeya Power Station certainly has provided a number of employment opportunities for the people in the Hinchinbrook electorate and Stanwell Corporation has provided welcome support to Tully State High School students through scholarships and encouraging career paths. On the other hand, however, the Beattie government's budget papers have revealed that the costs associated with the construction of Powerlink's controversial Tully to Innisfail transmission line have blown out. In fact, the total cost of the project has more than tripled from \$21 million in 2002 to \$68 million in 2007.

The Beattie government argued for seven years with the local community about having to choose the least-cost option to replace the ageing Kareeya to Innisfail transmission line, which it claimed was the coastal route. The Beattie government must now admit that it was wrong. The public was originally told in 2002 that the coastal route would cost \$21 million and that maintaining the alignment on the current inland route would be more expensive at \$41 million, despite the fact that the inland easement was already in place. Now that Powerlink has forced the alignment through almost 200 properties between Tully and Innisfail, we find out that the cost is actually \$68 million and the local communities have every right to feel outraged.

The Minister for Mines and Energy knows that I have consistently objected to this project and I feel now that the budget papers have revealed this extravagant blow-out, the community also has a right to feel vindicated in its opposition over a long period of time. If the Beattie government had simply done the common-sense thing and replaced the transmission line along the existing inland alignment, it would have been done by now and saved \$27 million of Queensland taxpayers' money, not to mention the anguish and the frustration caused to the families in this area as well as the lost land value and lost production area. I condemn the Beattie government for the outrageous contempt that it has shown to the communities between Tully and Innisfail in relation to this issue.

The cost of the MaMu canopy walk has more than doubled from \$4 million in the 2006-07 budget to \$10 million in the 2007-08 budget. I support the MaMu walk project as a worthwhile initiative to encourage tourism in the Wet Tropics, but I am worried that the ongoing delays could compromise the project if there are further problems and cost increases. The delays that have occurred to this point have been numerous and all the while the budget has blown out. I hope that this does not see the completion date put back any further, considering that the budget has now more than doubled.

The budgets submitted for the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries and the Environmental Protection Agency were cause for concern to me as a member of this place representing a regional electorate. Like the shadow minister for primary industries, the member for Toowoomba South, I was dismayed when the Treasurer failed to mention primary industries once in her speech. This is despite the fact that the rural sector contributes tens of millions of dollars to the state's economy and brings vital export dollars to Queensland.

The member for Toowoomba South made some very valid observations in the wake of the budget in relation to the claim by the government that the size of the DPIF budget has increased. I wonder if the Treasurer or the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries could provide a breakdown of the budget for the DPIF, taking into consideration the straight transfer of staff and resources from other government departments to form the new Queensland biosecurity unit within the DPIF. Once this is taken into account, perhaps we will see if there has been any funding increase to the DPIF in real terms.

All the larger capital works projects in the DPIF budget are in south-east Queensland at Gatton, Redlands, on Bribe Island and at Nambour. I wish those programs well. However, all of those major initiatives are located less than an hour's drive from Brisbane. Two smaller initiatives are planned for Oonoonba in Townsville and Coen on the Cape York Peninsula.

The South Johnstone Research Station in my electorate, which focuses on tropical agriculture in north Queensland and far north Queensland, is overdue for a fair go from the Beattie government. I hope that the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries gives serious consideration to widening the scope of capital works initiatives in the DPIF budget next year.

I am also very concerned that the Beattie government appears to have reduced its commitment to the control of feral animals and pest weed control in Queensland's national parks in this budget. On 6 February this year I asked the Minister for Environment and Multiculturalism a question on notice. I asked the minister to provide a breakdown of the EPA's expenditure on pest animal management and pest weed management for 2005-06 and what the EPA estimated it would spend on the same programs for 2006-07. The answer was promising, insofar as it indicated that it planned to increase funding from approximately \$4.5 million in 2005-06 to approximately \$5 million in 2006-07. I thought we were moving in the right direction.

As someone who has consistently raised with a number of Beattie government ministers the serious problems associated with the growing issues of pest weeds and feral animals, at least as far as the Wet Tropics is concerned, the announcement via press release from the Premier and the Treasurer on 4 June 2007 that this figure would be cut in the 2007-08 budget by \$500,000 to \$4.5 million has come as a major disappointment to me. The control of pest weeds and feral animals may not be a sexy environmental issue, but the reality is that as pest weeds and feral animals become more prolific they pose a major threat to the survival of endangered plants and animals, and cost farmers and landholders millions in lost production and control costs.

A number of projects have been carried over from or are not yet completed from last year's budget. I am glad to see that the Queensland government remains committed to them and in some cases they have increased the allocation. Included amongst the projects returning for another run in the 2007-08 budget papers include \$1.9 million to establish the Innisfail Community Centre. This was up from an allocation of \$1.45 million in last year's budget and this project will service communities in the far northern areas of my electorate.

A sum of \$1.5 million has been allocated to the development of the Bohlevale District Community Centre. This project will service communities in the far southern areas of my electorate. There is a welcome increase in the budget for the riverbank stabilisation project being undertaken at East Innisfail State School, which takes a number of students from my electorate. It is up from a budget allocation of \$460,000 in 2006-07 to \$774,000 in 2007-08. There is an increase of \$12,000 in the budget to build additional amenities at Tully State High School, which is up from a budget allocation of \$496,000 in 2006-07 to \$508,000 in 2007-08. I look forward to those projects being completed this financial year.

Importantly, I acknowledge and thank the state government for its contribution through the departments of Education, Local Government, Planning and Sport and Emergency Services towards the funding package for the multipurpose centre at Tully. The last piece of the funding package from the federal coalition government arrived recently and that facility will be a great asset to the community in the Cardwell Shire.

Like the rest of my colleagues from the coalition, I was appalled with the decision by the Beattie government to increase stamp duty on the sale of motor vehicles. While the Beattie government has made a big fuss over its belated decision to phase out mortgage duty over the next three years, it is hitting regional and rural Queenslanders in particular with this decision to increase stamp duty on motor vehicles, and most significantly on heavy transport vehicles and utilities. Almost no drivers will be spared this tax grab, with six cylinder family cars to also be hit by the stamp duty increase.

Stamp duty on a four-cylinder car will increase by 50 per cent. For a six-cylinder car, stamp duty will increase by 75 per cent and the stamp duty increase on vehicles with eight or more cylinders will increase by 100 per cent. That is an outrageous and punitive attack on the road transport industry.

So much relies on road transport in my electorate of Hinchinbrook and across north Queensland and far north Queensland generally, and this decision will undoubtedly have a very serious impact on the cost overheads of road transport operators. I am at a loss to understand why the Beattie government insists on targeting Queensland's most important and productive industries, such as the agricultural and mining sector, which are heavily reliant on heavy road transport.

The Beattie government has made much of what is in this budget for public housing. In the north and far north regions that my electorate covers, some programs have been given a boost and some have been cut quite significantly. I have written to the Minister for Public Works and Housing in relation to the shortage of public housing in the Hinchinbrook Shire. I look forward to his advice in relation to that issue.

While I welcome and am grateful for the allocations that have been made to my electorate of Hinchinbrook, I hope that the Treasurer takes notice of the issues that I have raised and can take steps to address them as soon as possible.