



Speech by

Andrew Cripps

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

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**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL;
INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT (ASSET RESTRUCTURING AND
DISPOSAL) BILL; FUEL SUBSIDY REPEAL AND REVENUE AND
OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

Mr CRIPPS (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (10.09 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Appropriation Bill for 2009-10, the Infrastructure Investment (Asset Restructuring and Disposal) Bill and the Fuel Subsidy Repeal and Revenue and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. The debate ought to be focused on the merits or otherwise of the appropriations in the budget proposed by the state government for the coming financial year. Instead it has been thrown in with other extremely important debates that ought to have been held separately and distinctly in this parliament, namely debate on the Infrastructure Investment (Asset Restructuring and Disposal) Bill, which facilitates the fire sale of state owned assets at the bottom of the market, and the Fuel Subsidy Repeal and Revenue and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, which imposes a new fuel tax on the people of Queensland for the first time, courtesy of the Bligh Labor government. In doing so, the state Labor government is trying to hide from proper scrutiny of the parliament.

As the representative of the people of Hinchinbrook, I ought to have had separate opportunities to address the state budget, the fire sale of state owned assets and the decision of the Bligh Labor government to impose a new fuel tax on Queenslanders in separate contributions as significant as all three of the issues are for my constituents. I understand why the government is hiding and trying to minimise the scrutiny of its decision. It is because of the total mess that it has made of the finances of the state of Queensland and the perilous implications that that has for this and future generations of Queenslanders.

My constituents are anxious about the level of debt being incurred by the state Labor government. They are worried about how much their families and businesses will have to pay in higher taxes, fees and charges to prop up the bottom line of the budget for years to come. The Bligh government has condemned Queenslanders to a decade of debt as a result of its financial incompetence, with state government debt projected to blow-out to \$85.5 billion. That is a diabolical figure and it is hard for a lot of Queenslanders to understand. It equates to about \$78,000 in state debt for a typical Queensland household of four people.

When the budget was handed down Queenslanders found out the real reasons why the Premier dashed to the polls six months early. The mess the Bligh Labor government has made of the state budget is abysmal. The budget papers project deficits totalling \$13.4 billion over the next four years without any plan to restore Queensland's AAA credit rating. The Bligh government will have to pay a \$14 million interest bill on its debt every day before it even starts to pay back any of it and starts employing additional police officers, teachers, nurses and ambulance officers across Queensland.

The introduction of a new fuel tax, the increase in motor vehicle registration and the increase in the electricity tariff are all examples of the Bligh government kicking Queenslanders when they are already down, struggling with the economic downturn. Every Queenslanders will pay for Labor's reckless spending for years to come. When we fill up our cars, when we buy food at the supermarket and when we turn on the lights it will be more expensive come 1 July 2009.

The Bligh Labor government has its hand in the pocket of every Queenslander to try to prop up the government's budget bottom line. Premier Bligh and Treasurer Fraser cannot blame the world economic downturn for their decision to mislead the people of Queensland and break their election promises in relation to the sale of government owned assets and the removal of the fuel subsidy. The reality is that the state government racked up \$64 billion of debt before the global financial crisis arrived. The state government has been spending like there is no tomorrow during the boom times. Now that there is an economic downturn, Premier Bligh and Treasurer Fraser have been caught short, and Queensland families and businesses will pay the price for Labor having sent the state broke during a boom.

I welcome the budget allocations that have been made for my electorate of Hinchinbrook, few that they are. Some schools in and servicing communities in my electorate have secured some capital funding. It is important that the state government deliver adequate funding to ensure all Queensland schools are well maintained, safe and provide a modern learning environment to maximise future opportunities for all Queensland students. Bohlevale State School has secured \$635,000 for the construction of additional amenities at the school. The 2009-10 budget papers indicate that \$550,000 will be spent in the forthcoming financial year. Bohlevale State School has a growing student population. The school is located in the rapidly expanding suburb of Burdell in my electorate on the northern beaches of Townsville city. These new amenities are really needed by the school.

Mr Watt interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr O'Brien): Order! Member for Everton!

Mr CRIPPS: The 2009-10 budget papers confirm that previously announced funding for \$32.2 million for the relocation of the Innisfail State High School to the Innisfail TAFE campus, with \$16.9 million to be spent in the coming financial year. The budget papers indicate that about \$15.3 million has already been spent on this project with a further \$16.9 million to be spent over the next 12 months to complete this new learning facility, which will co-locate with Innisfail TAFE.

While I am pleased to see that the \$508,000 contribution by Education Queensland for the new Tully multipurpose centre at Tully State High School is still in the budget, I welcome the new allocation for the school for additional amenities. The 2009-10 budget includes a new allocation for Tully State High School of \$488,000 for additional amenities. The budget indicates that these funds will be spent in the forthcoming year at my old alma mater, Tully High.

I welcome advice in the 2009-10 state budget that Stanwell Corporation and Ergon Energy will make investments in energy generation and distribution infrastructure in the Hinchinbrook electorate.

Mr Watt interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Everton!

Mr CRIPPS: I am pleased to see Stanwell Corporation, which owns and operates the Kareeya hydroelectric power station on the Tully River, will continue its ongoing commitment to regular allocations for maintenance and upgrades of that station.

Mr Reeves: How are you going to pay for all this?

Mr CRIPPS: Stanwell Corporation is paying for it. It has allocated \$1.9 million for minor works at Kareeya. Stanwell is an important employer in the Tully district and maintains a positive relationship with Tully State High School, supporting bursaries and encouraging potential career paths. The power station is also an important strategic asset in Far North Queensland. Ergon Energy has indicated that it will spend a further \$8 million reinforcing the supply of electricity to the Black River area near Townsville in my electorate of Hinchinbrook.

As I mentioned earlier, the northern beaches area of the city of Townsville from Burdell to Bluewater is a rapidly growing area. It is important that services and facilities expand to meet the requirements of the people who live in those communities. So I am pleased to see the investment by Ergon Energy in improving the supply of electricity out to Black River.

Mr Watt interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Will the member for Everton please cease interjecting.

Mr CRIPPS: I am confused about advice in the 2009-10 state budget papers that funding for the Jubilee Bridge in Innisfail has been increased by \$18 million. I was surprised to find the main roads department capital statement for 2009-10 showing an \$18 million allocation for the replacement of the Jubilee Bridge in Innisfail, with \$6 million due to be spent in the next financial year and \$12 million projected to be spent subsequent to that, given that the state government had previously only committed \$12 million to that project. It may very well be that that might be an error in the budget papers. I would be grateful if the Minister for Main Roads would clarify that in the near future.

Mr Reeves: It's not a Harbour Bridge.

Mr CRIPPS: I think that is a question that the Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Sport should be asking the Minister for Main Roads because I think it might be an error in the budget papers. Assistance for the Jubilee Bridge is just one of the recommendations by the Orion report to secure the financial sustainability of the Cassowary Coast Regional Council. I want to remind the state Labor government that the Orion report made four core recommendations designed to secure the future financial sustainability of the Cassowary Coast Regional Council. Funding for the Jubilee Bridge, be it \$12 million or \$18 million, is just one of those recommendations. The other three involve funding for the upgrade of the Geraldton Bridge following the relocation of Innisfail State High School—and it was a decision that the government made to move that school—and increased rates of subsidy for the urgently needed upgrade of the reticulated water system and the sewage treatment service in Innisfail.

Mr Watt interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I warn the member for Everton.

Mr CRIPPS: While the \$18 million or the \$12 million—whatever it turns out to be—for the Jubilee Bridge is a good start, it is just one piece of the puzzle for the Cassowary Coast Regional Council to have a chance at achieving financial sustainability. This has been outlined by the Orion report, but the state Labor government has not yet committed to implementing the four recommendations in full.

I will continue to press the government to provide substantial financial assistance to the Cassowary Coast Regional Council—

Mr Reeves: You're not going to sell the assets off?

Mr CRIPPS:—because those recommendations were made by the Local Government Reform Commission in recognition of the error that was made by the Queensland Treasury Corporation in assessing the financial position of the former Johnstone Shire Council. The Cassowary Coast Regional Council badly needs the assistance that I have outlined in this place on several occasions since it was created—

Mr Reeves: No answers.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The minister for Child Safety will cease interjecting.

Mr CRIPPS:—and the ratepayers really need that support. I will continue to advocate on their behalf.

Some of the measures in the 2009-10 state budget were recycled commitments from last year's budget. The government has failed to deliver the \$2 million Queensland Ambulance Service station in Tully that was promised in the previous budget. The government has also failed to deliver the new \$620,000 Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service ranger base in Cardwell that was promised in the last state budget. The capital expenditure statements for those departments indicate that they were supposed to be delivered during the current financial year but they have now been held over to the next financial year. I understand that some progress has been made towards delivering those projects. It just goes to show that we cannot trust the government to do what it says it is going to do. When these types of projects are delayed and carried over in subsequent years it makes a mockery of the budget process.

The redevelopments of the Ingham and Innisfail hospitals have received their final allocations in this year's budget. I am pleased that the budget confirms the remaining financial contributions for the Ingham Hospital project and the final contributions for the Innisfail Hospital redevelopment. Stage 2 of the new Ingham Hospital will involve the demolition of the old hospital and the redevelopment of off-street car parking and the installation of an emergency helicopter pad. The state budget papers indicate that \$570,000 will be spent on completing the Innisfail Hospital redevelopment this coming financial year.

I am very disappointed that the state government has failed to recognise that many regional and rural Queenslanders continue to be disadvantaged by its failure to increase the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme. There is no mention in the budget papers of any increased support for regional and rural patients who have to travel to access health services because more and more services are being withdrawn from smaller regional hospitals like Ingham and Tully. They have to travel longer distances to access health services like renal dialysis.

It is not just the cents per kilometre that is the problem; it is the accommodation subsidy that is inadequate. The process for applying for the subsidy is very complicated. It poses a lot of difficulties for the people for whom the subsidy is important to be able to afford the treatment itself. This is especially the case for those on low and fixed incomes. The removal of the fuel tax rebate by the Bligh government will mean transport costs will go up for these patients. The problem is getting worse instead of better. The government needs to act accordingly.

I note that the Minister for Natural Resources put out a press release boasting about the size of the almost \$1 billion budget of his department. In doing so, he has announced that he is going to declare more wild river areas. Minister Robertson indicated that the government intends to declare another 12 basins in

Queensland wild river areas over the next two years. But it has not even properly looked after the ones that it has already declared.

I have been asking the government for over 12 months to tell me when the Indigenous wild rivers ranger program will be rolled out on Hinchinbrook Island, given that Hinchinbrook Island was one of the original areas declared under the wild rivers legislation. I see in this budget that it intends to start thinking about it in the coming financial year. The state government has really been treating Hinchinbrook Island like a second-class wild river area up until now.

I am very concerned about the state government continuing its tradition of inflicting budget cuts on the primary industries and fisheries portfolio, which will be reduced substantially in the coming financial year. The budget handed down on Tuesday indicates that the primary industries and fisheries portfolio will suffer an overall operating budget cut of 7.4 per cent, with funding for services to stakeholders particularly badly affected.

Funding for services is down \$25 million, or 23 per cent, to \$82.4 million. We will see a whole range of front-line services wound back, withdrawn or axed across the state. The minister is offering some sort of political spin about a fresh initiative by putting more of the services online. But in reality it is just part of the same old story of the government cutting primary industries and fisheries budgets and reducing the on-the-ground services to the rural sector.

I turn to my shadow ministerial responsibility, disability services and multiculturalism. Before I make some remarks about the budget papers pertaining to the portfolio, I would like to take a moment to pay tribute to my predecessor in the portfolio, my friend and colleague the member for Burdekin, Rosemary Menkens. The member for Burdekin was a very committed advocate for people with disabilities and consistently demonstrated a real concern for their welfare and their circumstances. The member for Burdekin also strongly supported those who cared for people with a disability. Indeed, the member for Burdekin introduced a private member's bill—the Carers (Recognition) Bill—which was historically supported by the government. That is a lasting achievement of the member for Burdekin in the disability services portfolio of which she can be proud.

I would firstly like to deal with a couple of matters related to disabilities. The capital statement for disability services in the 2009-10 budget increased significantly to \$108.7 million, up from \$71.6 million in 2008-09. This represents an additional \$37.1 million in funding to disability services. More than half of the increase—\$21.7 million—is attributable to allocations made to property, plant and equipment. I cautiously welcome this increase. I am reluctant to get excited about it because, as the member for Burdekin pointed out during her speech in the budget debate last year, the state government has an unfortunate record of consistently underspending budget allocations in this area.

The member for Burdekin, during her speech in the budget debate last year, detailed this record of consistent underspending in the portfolio since 2002. Despite increased budget allocations in the disability services portfolio, the policies of the government that are intended to support people with disabilities are satisfying fewer and fewer people who receive them. I welcome and acknowledge the increased funding in this budget for disability services across-the-board, but the reality is that these increases do not appear to be resulting in better outcomes as satisfaction levels, which are reported in the budget papers, continue to fall.

This year the levels of satisfaction among clients of disability services accommodation support services dropped nine per cent, while 13 per cent more community support service users were dissatisfied. That is a significant drop which I do not think we can overlook. The government needs to start asking itself why the figures are consistently falling. We cannot always just throw money at a problem and expect to find a solution.

The government's increased allocation for disability support services in Queensland is not necessarily resulting in better outcomes from the point of view of people with disabilities. Obviously DSQ needs to do some listening. There are real and urgent requirements in the community and a pressing need to listen to people with disabilities and their families.

I turn now to allocations in the budget concerning multiculturalism in Queensland. I endorse the \$2 million that will be spent each year for three years as part of the Local Area Multicultural Partnership and Community Action for a Multicultural Society programs. These funding initiatives will support local governments and community organisations to undertake projects that promote multiculturalism, improve community relations and increase the capacity of people from culturally diverse backgrounds.

As a representative of a very culturally diverse electorate, I think it is appropriate for these efforts to be pursued at the local level. So I will not be critical of the community based approach to promoting multiculturalism. However, the state budget has failed to deliver some much needed services for multiculturalism.

Language is often the biggest single barrier facing migrants and refugees. Yet the budget papers do not indicate any support for linguistic services in the form of either tutoring or translations. Without the ability to communicate, simple day-to-day tasks such as going to the shops can become really difficult for people. This is particularly pronounced for people who have fled terrifying situations in their own countries

and who are required to make very quick transitions to new communities and cultures. Language is a key skill to ensure Queenslanders from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds can make the most of the opportunities in our communities and equally give them an opportunity to make contributions to ours.

This budget sets Queensland on a course to a record \$85.5 billion worth of debt, \$64 billion of which was run up before the Bligh government started to talk about and blame the current economic downturn. Queenslanders want to know how under Labor the government went broke.

Mr Watt: Here we go!