



Speech by

**Andrew Cripps**

**MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK**

Hansard Thursday, 10 June 2010

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## **APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr CRIPPS** (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (4.40 pm): The Bligh government has handed down a traditional Labor budget that imposes more debt and higher taxes on Queenslanders. Despite claims by Treasurer Fraser that the state's economy is improving, the 2010-11 budget papers reveal that Queensland's debt increased from \$43 billion in 2008-09 to \$51 billion in 2009-10 and is on track to blow out to nearly \$84 billion on current projections. The debt and the interest on that debt continues to grow and the 2010-11 budget papers still contain no repayment plan. The debt and the interest on this debt will eventually need to be serviced by Queensland taxpayers. Under the Bligh Labor government, taxes, fees and charges on Queenslanders will continue to increase. We have more debt and higher taxes—a traditional Labor budget indeed.

My constituents in the Hinchinbrook electorate are very anxious about how this debt will affect them in the future. Under the Bligh government, the cost of living for Queensland families and the cost of doing business in Queensland is spiralling out of control. Labor has introduced a new fuel tax, after promising that it would not. It has increased car registration, it has overseen a huge increase in electricity prices, it has increased a range of licence fees and, in the budget this week, it has delivered a new commercial waste levy. The Bligh Labor government is taxing us more than ever.

Despite insisting that Queensland's economic position is improving, the budget papers show that the Bligh government still intends to undertake a fire sale of state owned public assets, including Queensland Rail, our ports, our motorways and our plantation forests. That is despite the fact that its policy is strongly opposed by the overwhelming majority of Queenslanders. The LNP opposition has made it clear that it is opposed to the fire sale of state owned assets which is proposed by the Bligh government.

The fact that the 2010-11 Queensland state budget papers do not take into consideration the possible impact of the Rudd Labor government's proposed super profits tax on the mining industry means that, if the mine tax goes ahead, the figures and the projections in it cannot be trusted. The truth is that, if Premier Bligh fails to stand up to Kevin Rudd on behalf of all Queenslanders and join with the LNP to oppose the super profits tax on the mining industry, it will be unlikely that we could rely on anything in Treasurer Fraser's budget to be accurate. Of course Premier Bligh and Treasurer Fraser will not stand up to Kevin Rudd on the super profits tax on the mining industry. Instead of standing up for Queensland, where the mining industry underpins the economy, especially in regional areas of the state, they will kowtow to the Rudd Labor government. The Premier and the Treasurer—Raggedy Ann and Andy, the spineless rag doll playthings of Kevin Rudd and Wayne Swan—will sell us out. They will capitulate and they will hand over our mining royalties to Canberra.

The contribution in the 2010-11 state budget papers to my electorate of Hinchinbrook is rather underwhelming. In the area of education, I am rather disappointed that, despite more than 40 schools being either located in or servicing communities in my electorate, only one school will benefit from any capital funding in this budget. I welcome the \$1.5 million allocation for the construction of a new kindergarten at Bluewater State School. Bluewater is a growing area of the northern beaches of Townsville

and I am pleased that the needs of this growing school in my electorate have been recognised. But for that allocation to be the full extent of new capital funding for schools in my electorate is a real concern. In terms of modern school facilities and resources, students and staff in schools within and servicing communities in my electorate of Hinchinbrook deserve a fair go from the Bligh government.

I want to flag the need for a new primary school to be constructed in the near future to service the rapidly growing needs of the suburbs on the northern beaches of Townsville. Bohlevale State School has approximately 780 students. Education Queensland considers that the enrolments of Bohlevale State School are currently at about 93 per cent of capacity. Residential growth on the northern beaches of Townsville in my electorate in the new North Shore development and the suburbs of Burdell, Bushland Beach and Mount Low is very strong. Bohlevale State School also accepts students from the adjacent electorate of Thuringowa, from the suburbs of Deeragun and Jensen, and the new suburb of Cosgrove is planned for the Bohle Plains area. So there will be ongoing residential growth in that area, which will mean a requirement for additional educational facilities. I implore the Queensland government to plan properly for the growth in that area.

In the area of the environment, I am concerned about the absence of any clear allocation in the 2010-11 budget for the new Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service ranger base in Cardwell, which was first promised by the Bligh government in the 2008-09 state budget papers. This project is long overdue. The new QPWS ranger base at Cardwell was already a recycled item in the 2009-10 state budget, but now it appears that it has disappeared altogether from the budget papers. I certainly hope that this is just an oversight and that this important project for Cardwell has not been abandoned by the Bligh Labor government. I have written to the environment minister seeking advice about the failure of the Bligh Labor government to deliver this project on time and about the absence of any specific budget allocation for the facility in the 2010-11 budget papers.

In the area of infrastructure, previously announced funding for infrastructure upgrades in the Cassowary Coast region of \$13.7 million for a water treatment plant and \$26.7 million for a sewage treatment plant in Innisfail and the \$6.6 million previously announced for a sewage treatment plant upgrade for Lucinda and Dungeness in the Hinchinbrook shire have been confirmed in the 2010-11 state budget. I welcomed these allocations when they were announced.

However, in respect of the allocations for the Cassowary Coast region, I note that these allocations give effect to recommendations contained in the Orion report, which I have been lobbying the state Labor government to act on for several years in this House in the wake of the amalgamation of the former shires of Johnstone and Cardwell, to deliver relief to ratepayers across the Cassowary Coast region. I regret that it has taken so long and so many reminders from me for the state government to act on recommendations contained in a report that it commissioned.

Apart from those previously announced allocations, there are no new infrastructure initiatives in my electorate, which would indicate that all the rhetoric from the Bligh Labor government about decentralisation and regional development is just political spin. I cannot see any funding to encourage commercial or industrial development in regional communities in my electorate such as Ingham, Cardwell, Tully, Mission Beach or Innisfail notwithstanding the Bligh Labor government talking up the need to encourage population decentralisation and regional development.

In the area of energy, for several years I have been pleased to see regular allocations by Stanwell Corporation in the Kareeya hydroelectric power station on the Tully River to undertake maintenance and capacity upgrades. This year, I welcome the \$2.68 million allocation for upgrades to the Kareeya hydroelectric power station, west of Tully, which is an important strategic part of North Queensland's electricity infrastructure network. Stanwell Corporation is an important employer in the Tully district and it maintains a positive relationship with Tully State High School, supporting bursaries and encouraging potential career paths for students.

In respect of main roads and transport, while previously announced federal funding commitments have been confirmed in the state budget, there are no new announcements for the state road network in the Hinchinbrook electorate. I acknowledge that the first instalment of \$20 million for the previously announced \$115 million for the upgrade of the northern section of the Cardwell Range on the Bruce Highway and the first instalment of \$20 million for the previously announced \$150 million upgrade of the Bruce Highway between Innisfail and Cairns are confirmed in the state budget.

I also acknowledge that the \$14 million from the Queensland government for the replacement of the Jubilee Bridge in Innisfail is confirmed in the state budget. Again, this is an Orion report recommendation that should have been acted on some time ago. The issue has come to a head in recent weeks with the closure of the Jubilee Bridge. I will continue to work towards securing the balance of the cost of the new Jubilee Bridge from the federal government to deliver relief to all ratepayers in the Cassowary Coast region.

I am disappointed not to see new funds in the budget for upgrade to roads that have been a priority for me in the Hinchinbrook electorate. These include the Innisfail-Japoonvale road and the Silkwood-Japoonvale road, known as the Canecutter Way, and the Bruce Highway between Black River and Bluewater north of Townsville for which I believe planning needs to be progressed to expand this stretch to four lanes following on from the upgrades between the Bohle and Mount Low Parkway turn-off overpass. However, I will keep pressing the state government and the federal government on behalf of my constituents.

I note the allocation of \$226,000 by the Far North Queensland Ports Corporation for a new commercial fishing facility at Mourilyan Harbour. The details concerning where this new facility will be located within Mourilyan Harbour, what features it will include and when it will be constructed are not yet clear. The commercial fishing industry is an important employer in the Innisfail district. As the only all-weather and all-tide port between Cairns and Townsville, Mourilyan Harbour is an important port for the local commercial fishing industry. It is important that the port authority consult with local stakeholders before this facility is built.

In the area of health, once again I am rather disappointed that the Bligh government has failed to recognise that many rural and regional Queenslanders continue to be disadvantaged by its failure to increase the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme. There is no mention in the state budget papers of any increase in support for rural and regional patients to access healthcare services. The withdrawal of services from smaller hospitals in my electorate, like Ingham and Tully, means that more patients are required to travel longer distances to Townsville or Cairns for basic health care like renal dialysis. It is not just the cents per kilometre subsidy that is inadequate but also the accommodation subsidy. The process involved in applying for the subsidy is also rather complicated. This poses difficulties for many people to whom the subsidy is important to be able to afford treatment, such as those on low and fixed incomes. The removal of the fuel tax rebate by the Bligh government means that transport costs have increased for patients, many of whom have chronic illnesses.

I turn now to my shadow ministerial responsibilities of disability services and multicultural affairs. The Minister for Disability Services, Annastacia Palaszczuk, from the time that she came into the portfolio, has clearly articulated her priorities in the disability services sector, being young people in aged care, assisting ageing carers and early intervention and support for children with disabilities. I make no criticism of the minister because those priorities are worthy priorities and she has worked diligently in this regard. Last week we had the early release of the disability services budget. The claim by the minister and the Premier was that the budget for disability services would reach \$1 billion in 2010-11, with an extra \$12.5 million this year to support young people with a disability leaving school, to support people with spinal cord injuries, for early intervention and support services for families of children with disabilities and for early intervention centres for children with autism in Bundaberg and Mackay. Again, these are worthy initiatives for this budget and I make no criticism of the allocation of these funds.

Budget allocations are just that: they are allocations. They are not expenditures. The real measure of commitment to any policy objective is where the rubber hits the road. It is all very well for the Premier and the minister to announce a record budget, but it will only make a difference if those budget allocations are expended on disability support services over the next financial year. Unfortunately, in the disability services sector Labor has a long record of announcing allocations but not delivering on them. Between 2002-03 and 2008-09, the state government has on average failed to spend 51 per cent of infrastructure funds promised to the disability support sector. Of the \$295.5 million in infrastructure spending promised by Labor during that time, only \$145.9 million was actually spent. That means that \$149.6 million of infrastructure funds promised to the disability support sector in those seven budgets was not handed over by the state government. That is a disgrace and an indictment on this government.

Those seven budgets were not overseen by the current minister, Minister Palaszczuk. That disgraceful legacy has been left behind by former ministers in that portfolio. The worst underspending was a shocking 83 per cent underspend in the area of infrastructure funding to the disability support sector in the 2005-06 budget. This new minister had an opportunity to turn over a new leaf and address this legacy. Unfortunately, the budget papers reveal that in many programs in the disability services budget the underspending continued in the 2009-10 financial year. So it appears that the minister is unfortunately continuing the tradition.

A broken promise is not easy to cop from any government. When a government pledges funding and resources to people with a disability and those who support them, they make a moral commitment to each and every one of them. This group of people is amongst the most vulnerable in our community. When a government makes announcements about what it is going to do, it fosters hope and optimism in people who start to believe that their extraordinarily tough lives might be about to get that little bit more manageable. If you let them down—not once, not twice but in eight consecutive budgets on infrastructure spending—it is very hard to justify.

Yesterday at the budget breakfast here at Parliament House, jointly hosted by National Disability Services Queensland and the Queensland Alliance, the non-government service providers belled the cat during question time. Representatives from Granite Belt Support Services in Stanthorpe asked why their desperate pleas for a capital grant had been ignored by the state government for several years. It is a perfectly legitimate question when we consider that infrastructure underspending averaged 51 per cent against budget allocations over the financial years 2002-03 to 2008-09. A representative from the Endeavour Foundation spoke about the serious problems that non-government service providers have faced meeting the costs of implementing recommendations in the Carter report.

I have spoken several times in this place, including during debate on the State Penalties Enforcement and Other Legislation Amendment Bill in November 2009 and during the debate on the Criminal History Screening Legislation Amendment Bill in February this year, about the lack of financial support provided to non-government organisations to help them meet the cost of compliance in respect of Carter report recommendations. Clearly the minister was not listening to me, but, more importantly, she has not been listening to the non-government disability service providers who support clients who exhibit challenging behaviours and in doing so utilise restrictive practices.

Well might these NGO service providers ask such a legitimate question when once again we find that, after seven consecutive years of serious underspending against budget allocations, the latest budget papers reveal that that serious underspending has continued in the 2009-10 financial year.

The minister has made much of her plan to deliver more early intervention support services for children with autism. Once again, it is a commendable priority. The test is what is happening on the ground, especially in regional and rural areas of Queensland. I acknowledged before the initiatives in Mackay and Bundaberg, but the story is not the same everywhere. I have previously raised in this House the concerns and frustrations of Waminda Services Ltd, a non-government service provider based in Dalby and delivering disability support services to communities throughout the Western Downs. Let me quote directly from a press release issued yesterday by Waminda Services Ltd which provides a view of disability support services funding to NGOs in regional and rural Queensland. It states—

Western Downs disability service booted out of budget.

Children in south-western Queensland have again been ignored despite huge funding for community services announced in Tuesday's State budget.

The press release goes on—

'Bloody typical,' according to Waminda chief executive officer Steven Hicks, who has been fighting for funding from Premier Anna Bligh and disabilities minister Anastacia Palaszczuk for the past two years.

'They will not see the high and growing need out here—despite their people acknowledging that our figures showing one school-aged child in 53 is diagnosed ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) are correct.'

'This is another kick in the guts for people living in the bush.'

'What happened for government for all of the people of Queensland—of Australia—irrespective of the colour of the government of the day ... someone should explain that to Anna and Kevin.'

I table that press release for the information of the House.

*Tabled paper:* Copy of a media release, dated 9 June 2010, titled 'Western Downs disability service booted out of budget' [2415].

Lastly, in the area of multicultural affairs, I note from the Service Delivery Statement that the department will continue to focus its delivery of programs in partnership with non-government organisations and local governments that promote multiculturalism, improve community relations and increase the capacity of people from culturally diverse backgrounds. I endorse this approach. The SDS also indicates that, for the first time, the department will commence measuring the number of grants provided through the annual grant application process and the number of people participating in events and festivals sponsored by Multicultural Affairs Queensland.

Some may argue that such measures are overdue. However, I would caution against an overly simplistic interpretation of these measures. The new SDS measures will record simple numbers in terms of grants and participation. While that data, in a quantitative sense, will be useful, it will of course be unable, in a qualitative sense, to inform us for the purposes of the budget papers of the effectiveness in the community of individual grants to achieve the goals set out in the multicultural services budget.