



Speech by

DESLEY BOYLE

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

Hansard 17 September 1998

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL
APPROPRIATION BILL

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (3.05 p.m.): In rising to speak in this debate I shall highlight some of the aspects of the Budget that will be particularly welcomed by those in Cairns and far-north Queensland generally. I note that the honourable member for Barambah misunderstands the agreement of Labor members. She does not appear to understand the elaborate and extensive mechanisms that are behind Labor Party consultation in the regions. Over recent years in Cairns I have participated in a number of activities to make our presence and opinions felt by those in the Labor Party in Brisbane. I can bear witness to the fact that that long process has, in fact, influenced the very Budget that we welcome here today.

I particularly recognise that this is a Budget for all Queenslanders. Sometimes those of us who live thousands of kilometres from Brisbane feel that we are not understood or heard by the centre of Government but, according to this Budget, that is not so. This Budget truly supports regional development. The Budget is responsible and balanced, and I support the Treasurer's objectives of delivering cohesion, stability and financial stimulus at a time of economic uncertainty. Most importantly for those of us in the far north and, I dare say, for people throughout the State, this Budget will deliver jobs.

I would like to highlight several important elements within the Budget, because I think they bear repeating. Despite the drain that will be created by increasing the quality of services, and despite our wish to provide employment assistance and to generate employment in the private sector, in GFS terms the Budget is still in surplus this year. There are no new or increased taxes or charges in the Budget and the Budget fulfils Labor's election commitments. Commitments worth \$380m are fully funded in the Budget. It may well be the perception of some who are not experienced in the world of politics that when in Opposition Labor members made promises willy-nilly. Of course, that is not so. The promises and commitments that are reflected by the provision of \$380m are the outcome of many regional meetings and consultations that placed the Treasurer and other senior members of the Government in a position to make those commitments and now to follow through on them.

I particularly drew attention to some of the important employment initiatives that are part of this Budget. Over four years, \$283m will be provided for the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle package. This is the first exciting year in which we can implement that package. There has been a 4.8% increase in the budget of the Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations, which is, of course, essential if we are to implement our Breaking the Unemployment Cycle package as well as possible. We must have the staff to implement that package.

I reiterate that this Government places great importance on its policy to create 6,500 apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities in Government departments, local government and statutory authorities. The previous State coalition Government and the present Federal coalition Government were mistaken in their belief that the private sector will create employment if it is left alone by Government. That is not so. Government has to lead the way. It is appropriate that the Labor Government is leading the way in sending the message to the private sector that we want to generate jobs and build a level of confidence in the private sector that will lead to increased employment. In particular, I welcome the \$144m that will be spread across the State so that Government authorities generate employment.

The other part of the employment budget to which I wish to draw attention is the \$109m to be spent on creating 9,000 job placements for the long-term unemployed. Unlike the previous State coalition Government and the present Federal coalition Government, I believe in giving another chance to those who have had a hard time to date and who have not found their way into education and employment. It is the Government's job to look after those people, to open the door and to provide programs targeted towards meeting their needs and giving them a chance. Should we reach the levels of success of Working Nation, which had a success rate of about 30% with respect to long-term unemployed job programs, we can be proud. It may well be that we will achieve a higher success rate.

I am pleased that that \$109m plan targets not only youth but also those people of mature age who for some reason have been unable to continue in their previous areas of employment or skill. It also targets young people who have offended under our criminal justice system and gives them another chance to establish a good and healthy life in which employment adds to their self-esteem and sense of membership of the community.

For far-north Queensland in particular this translates to 2,400 apprenticeships, traineeships and job placements. As the member for Cairns, I look forward to working with local industry, Government agencies and educational facilities to make sure that those 2,400 placements are filled in one form or another as soon as possible. One of the ways in which those jobs will be generated is through the Government's Capital Works Program. I reiterate that this Government is spending billions of dollars on capital works. Some \$608.7m will be spent on hospitals and other health infrastructure. Cheers should be heard from the electorate. Nothing matters more to constituents than their health and that of family members and friends.

\$2.2 billion will be spent on transport. In this modern world, unless we can travel by air, sea and road by public transport, we cannot undertake the projects that will lead to a prosperous society. Some \$830.9m will be spent on mining, energy and electricity infrastructure. That is a proper budget allocation from a Government that is looking to the future. \$372.3m will be spent on law, order and public safety infrastructure. Some of us may wish that such a large allocation was not necessary, but it is needed, and with it will flow the jobs and lifestyles that will keep our constituencies healthy.

This Government is bringing down a record Health budget—\$3.722 billion. That figure is up 8.4% on the previous Government's Budget last year and is 3.6% more than the previous Government had planned for this year. That translates to 600 new jobs in the delivery of health services and 9,000 construction jobs. It translates to an extra \$11m for mental health services. It is not before time that our society recognised that hiding away from mental health problems was limiting not only for the people and the families concerned but for our society. It is appropriate that at this point in history we recognise the importance of mental health and fund services for it.

\$18.05m will be provided for extra elective surgery and other measures to cut public hospital waiting lists. When one is in pain and threatened by illness, it is important that one is treated in our public system as quickly as possible. This \$18.5m allocation will contribute to a reduction in some of the waiting times that have caused distress for families around Queensland. An additional \$2.5m will target waiting times in particular in public hospital accident and emergency wards.

It is unfortunate that we need to spend an extra \$1.5m on drug and alcohol-related services. Again, we wish that was not the case. However, it is necessary. Public education and promotion of the management and treatment of drug and alcohol abuse is an appropriate priority in the Health budget. One initiative in particular of this Government under the Health budget that I welcome is the \$1.5m allocated for providing free parenting courses and support for families. It is time that we assisted those who through whatever experiences are finding difficulty in raising their children; that we show them in this difficult, modern, busy world with so many pressures upon us how they can guide their children wisely into adulthood.

I note, too, that \$700,000 has been set aside to combat hearing loss caused by middle ear infections in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children—children who have not had access, as have many of us from a European background in Queensland, to good health services over the many years of their own and their parents' history. Those extra funds will contribute to addressing the imbalance between the health services available to indigenous people and the broader community. \$2.3m has been allocated for palliative care. When little is left that can be done to prolong people's lives, we should assist older people as well as those struck down by terminal illness to move from this world in as little pain and with the most dignified care possible. I welcome the \$2.3m in funding for palliative care.

I turn to what this House knows already to be my favourite topic—Cairns, which should be pleased with this Budget. Unfortunately, our local newspaper has dubbed the Budget as fair. I think that shows a lack of recognition of the broader Statewide Budget and how well Cairns and far-north Queensland have done. This year, \$26.4m—an increase of \$5m—is to be spent on the redevelopment of the Cairns Base Hospital. Over this three-year period, the budget for the redevelopment of the Cairns Base Hospital has increased by \$17.9m. When we take the further commitment to a CT scanner worth \$1.2m into account, we see that the redevelopment is fully funded with that additional amount of

\$19.1m. There is no issue of greater concern to the public of far-north Queensland than the completion of the hospital—something Labor promised at the time of announcing the redevelopment. It is an indictment of the former Government that Labor has had to find in this Budget the additional \$19.1m to complete it to standard. It will be welcomed year in and year out by all of us in Cairns who will have occasion to go to the Cairns Base Hospital.

I particularly welcome the announcement of \$28.5m for the expansion of the Cairns Convention Centre and the establishment of a basketball centre in Cairns. This project was negotiated, and somewhat poorly so, by the previous Government. It allowed variously \$20m, \$21m and \$22m for the Cairns Convention Centre expansion. Our own study of the figures indicates that \$28.5m is necessary, so we have upped the amount in the Budget by \$7m—\$24m to be spent this year and the additional \$4.5m to be spent in 1999-2000.

A particular amount of money that will be welcomed in Cairns is the \$10m for the revitalisation of the city centre. This \$10m has not yet been targeted into specific projects, which is welcome. Rather than Brisbane deciding for the people of Cairns in what ways this money should best be spent to revitalise our city centre to integrate the functions of residents, recreation, business, tourism and retail, the decisions will be left to the people of Cairns and in particular to the leaders of organisations associated with the city centre.

There is \$5m in the Budget for the beginning of the Cairns esplanade project. The esplanade is a very important landmark in Cairns. There is \$1.2m in the Budget to complete the lighting of Cazaly's AFL park, a multi-user sports facility. With that, this year we will see the transfer of a stadium from the Gabba to Cazaly's AFL park in Cairns.

There is \$1m for initial work on the Cairns-Brisbane tilt train project, another form of tourism for the tourism hub that is Cairns. I particularly welcome the \$3.5m allocated under public housing targeted towards the community renewal program in the Manoora public housing area. This is money not just for housing, streetscape revisions and changes to roadworks, but also to assist the community to come together and develop its own action plan, to provide community facilities, to provide recreation facilities and, in the process, to offer employment for all those living in the area—an area that is regarded in some ways as less than salubrious, as less glamorous than some other parts of Cairns. The area has high unemployment figures and considerable indication of social dislocation. It is the ambition of this Government to achieve—and we will work to achieve it—in three to five years from now a community that is integrated and proud, and equal to any other in the Cairns area.

Mr Schwarten: And thank you for the role that you're taking in that.

Ms BOYLE: Thank you, Minister. In particular, I recognise the \$750,000 to be spent by the Department of State Development over three years in the Cairns region on economic development initiatives established locally—the clustering program of bringing together groups of like industries and encouraging them to collaborate instead of compete, to pool their resources, to pool their planning efforts, to pool their export marketing and in that way develop economic initiatives beyond the size of a small city, as Cairns really is.

In conclusion, I give clear recognition to the benefit that people in Cairns and far-north Queensland will derive from this Budget. I send my congratulations to Treasury staff for the clear way in which the Budget documents have been presented—for the easy cross-reference for those of us in regions to discover the funding regionally, as well as to discover funding under different departmental headings.

Particularly, my congratulations go to the Treasurer, who had to work within the framework of the previous Government's Budget and stand by the commitments made by that previous Government. Yet at the same time he managed to adjust the Budget to meet Labor's promises and to stamp the Labor ideology of employment creation and service delivery, while maintaining budgetary integrity, firmly on the front cover.
