



Speech by

HOWARD HOBBS

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

Hansard 18 September 1998

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL
APPROPRIATION BILL

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (11.32 a.m.): This Budget is the coalition's Budget which has been cut and pasted and refashioned to fit Labor's agenda. Cutting and pasting within a solid framework is very different from actually developing the goods oneself. There is no doubt that when one has a good foundation one can build a reasonable home.

However, we are witnessing Labor's agenda again with the drift of funding from west of the Great Dividing Range to the south-east corner. Local government has not escaped the funding drift, with substantial cutbacks to waste management, the Queensland Government Agent Program and the Cape York Peninsula land use program. There is no doubt that the Treasurer has brought down a Budget using the old smoke and mirrors trick.

The Treasurer has budgeted for \$4.8 billion of capital works funding. However, he has announced up to \$5.1 billion worth of funding. That means that there is a \$300m illusion being created with smoke and mirrors. It is very convenient for the Treasurer to pull this figure out of the air for carryovers. This is another of the Treasurer's dishonest tricks on Queenslanders. How on earth can politicians gain the respect of the community when we have that type of thing going on? Another example is the 5% unemployment push by Peter Beattie. First of all the goal was to be achieved in one year, then it was two years and now it is in five years. This reminds me of Bob Hawke saying that no child will live in poverty by the year 1990. I am also reminded that, in the middle of a recession, Paul Keating said, "What a lovely set of figures." People knew that these men were lying even as they were talking. They also know that the Treasurer is lying.

Mr HAMILL: I rise to a point of order. Those comments are clearly unparliamentary and I ask that they be withdrawn.

Mr HOBBS: I withdraw. People out there know that the Treasurer is trying to fiddle with the figures.

Mr HAMILL: I rise to a point of order. It is highly offensive——

Mr HOBBS: \$300m, and he has not even got them in the Budget.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Mickel): Order! The member for Warrego will resume his seat. I will hear the Treasurer.

Mr HAMILL: The suggestion that the Treasurer would be trying to fiddle the figures or fiddle the books is highly offensive. I take umbrage at those remarks. I find them offensive. I ask that they be withdrawn.

Mr HOBBS: I withdraw. Does the Treasurer not know that capital works come in all shapes and sizes and that to predict the exact capital works carryover is difficult? However, he can put \$300,000 on Bankcard and thus be able to sneak some of those unfunded election promises through to save face. The Treasurer is using nothing more than funny money. There are always carryovers in capital works programs. However, the money needs to be in the bank first. One cannot put capital works on credit cards because one will have considerable difficulty at the end of the day in paying the bill.

Unlike the Treasurer, the people of Queensland cannot rely on tricks to get them by; they have to pay the bill for the Treasurer's tricks. Not only do they have to pay the bills for these tricks but they also have to suffer the cutbacks to the third tier of government—local government. Local government suffered a huge funding cutback in relation to what was committed by the former Government. The coalition committed a \$200m package to enable local government to rehabilitate waste sites. This package has been axed in this Budget. The coalition had promised \$20m a year over the next 10 years for waste site rehabilitation. Labor has allocated only \$7.5m over two years.

Mr Hamill: There was no funding for that in the Budget at all.

Mr HOBBS: The coalition was committed to putting it in place over a 10-year period.

Mr Hamill: There was nothing in the Budget.

Mr HOBBS: The Treasurer has decided not to put that funding in.

Waste management is critical for environmental credentials. Effective waste management and rehabilitation of sites is fundamental to a better environment. The Local Government Association has publicly stated that it believes that \$35m per annum is required. The association has stated that there is overwhelming evidence to support this view. The association has publicly stated that it is bitterly disappointed with the Government for suggesting that it would be a waste of money to give councils any more funding at this early stage. I call on the Government to put together a program that will resolve this issue.

I wish to refer to the Environmental Protection Agency. This Government is setting up a bureaucracy of environmental police. The agency will be an enforcement agency to police the environmental requirements of this Labor Government. Local government cannot be expected to clean up rubbish when the rubbish bin has holes and leaks in it. Local government has to be adequately funded to deal with waste management issues rather than be browbeaten by the Environmental Protection Agency. Local government will have to come begging cap in hand for assistance to deal with waste management problems. Queenslanders will suffer if local government has to raid allocations for essential services in order to meet the EPA requirements.

The coalition promised \$1m towards the expansion of the Queensland Government Agent Program—QGAP. This boost of \$1m would increase the availability of QGAP offices to needy communities in rural and regional Queensland. These offices provide a one-stop-shop approach to Government services and provide information to rural and regional towns. The coalition Government focused the provision of these agencies in towns that had lost their banking facilities. I refer to such places as Dirranbandi, Thargomindah, Mitchell and Cunnamulla.

This Government has forgotten the rural and regional communities who have suffered from the economic rationalists. The Government has cut in half the funding boost promised by the coalition for the QGAP program. This is an extraordinary situation when we consider that the Labor Government recognises the enormous benefits of the program.

Another important issue is the Cape York Peninsula Land Use Study. This was the first real strategy that the north has ever really had. Former Labor Governments have treated the people of the cape as second-class citizens. Labor took away the livelihoods of residents with the stroke of a pen. I refer to the wilderness zone. Those people had a dreadful time with all the drama that occurred in the north. The coalition Government was committed to getting industry going in the cape and ensuring that people who had lived and worked there all their lives could continue to do so.

In its May Budget the coalition Government allocated \$67,000 to the CYPLUS program. This Budget cuts the heart out of the cape by reducing the funding to \$17,000. Stage 2 has basically been completed. There is some implementation work to be put in place, but the whole thing is held up for at least another 12 months until further funding can be provided. At that stage there will be a chance to implement some of the appropriate CYPLUS findings.

There has been some concern expressed in relation to the Moreton Bay islands study. The people on the islands are concerned that the current strategy may disfranchise quite a few landowners, particularly those who have been there for quite some time. Land values have not been very kind to the residents. The people are concerned that, if the strategy goes ahead and land is resumed, the value of the resumptions will be dramatically reduced. Those people believe that the study has brought down the price of land. I ask the Minister to see what he can do to make sure that those people are adequately represented and compensated.

There are ways in which the Government could provide airconditioning to schools in western areas of the State without a massive outlay of funds. I believe that this issue is very, very important. Although school buses are airconditioned, cars are airconditioned and, in many cases, houses are airconditioned, the schools in the west are not airconditioned. School communities are active and often willing to raise up to half the funds needed to aircondition their schools themselves. However, there is no program for the Government to look at those communities that are happy to help themselves. The

schools that are able to raise a portion of the funds themselves should be given due consideration by the Government and provided with assistance in the form of at least matched funding. There are ways of doing this under the current education program without creating precedents. I believe that we need to consider that very seriously to try to help those kiddies out there.

The Development Incentive Scheme was the first real opportunity for inland communities to address the drift of population to the cities. Through that scheme, we provided assistance for capital works for those people who wanted to build water storages on their properties, and the Government paid up to 22% of the capital cost. The idea was to try to encourage regional development; if we could get enough people in the one area to start the construction of a cotton gin, a citrus factory or something like that, we could get some regional development going. We were prepared to put \$100m over five years into that particular program. Initially, we had a very high limit on it of \$200,000 for those people who were eligible for it, but that was reduced to \$75,000, which was more appropriate. That would have created an enormous number of jobs in rural industry. I am very disappointed that this Government has removed that very important program from the Budget.

Water development was one way in which the inland rural communities could create jobs, and jobs that would be in the community for generations to come. I cite the example of the mining industry. It is great, and we support the mining industry. However, the life of a mine can be 10 or 20 years or even longer. But irrigation schemes can last for generations, and dams in particular can last for 150 years. It is very important to have sustainable development. The development incentive scheme was a pilot scheme, and it was going very well. The Government has announced that the Dawson dam will go ahead. I was quite amused by that announcement. We were quite right in making the assumptions that we did that the Dawson dam was sustainable. The Water Allocation Management Plan was under way. The predictions that we made at that time have now been proved to be correct. I am very pleased about that. I believe that the Government needs to get on with the job and get things going as soon as possible. One of the most important things that water development can do is create jobs. This Government tells us that it is all about jobs, jobs, jobs; and 100,000 jobs can be created with water development.

Mr Hamill interjected.

Mr HOBBS: We started it. In fact, it was my program. I started it. I am pleased that the Treasurer has at least kept that program going. However, I am a bit concerned that maybe he is dragging his heels with it. I believe that he can see the benefit of it, but he is not really keen to publicise it. I say to the Treasurer: if you want jobs, jobs, jobs, get water development going in Queensland.

I wish to touch on a couple of other issues that are very important. One disappointing aspect of this Budget is the Government's intentions with respect to prisons. Many people in the western regions would like to try to have access to one of the three smaller prisons that were going to be built. The people in my electorate at Charleville were also keen on that. But having just one prison in the south-east corner of the State rules out the opportunity for those regional communities to get some sort of a boost for their economies and their communities. That certainly is very disappointing. One of the things that we have to do is try to stop the drift of population from the west to the east. We have to do more than we have been doing at present. Unless we can get some jobs created out there in those regional communities, things will continue the way they have done in the past.
