



Speech by

Dr LESLEY CLARK

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

Hansard 18 September 1998

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL
APPROPRIATION BILL

Dr CLARK (Barron River—ALP) (2.44 p.m.): On 14 May this year in an article in the Cairns Post, my predecessor in this House, Lyn Warwick, predicted that the coalition Government would prove its commitment to the far north through Treasurer Joan Sheldon's Budget. In that article headed "Budget a boost to the north", she stated—

"I think the people of far-north Queensland won't be neglected at all— the coalition Government will prove our commitment to them."

One can imagine her consternation the next morning when she picked up her copy of the Cairns Post and was confronted by a large colour photograph of the then Premier and the then Treasurer smiling happily on the front page accompanied by the headline "North loses." That said it all.

Sadly for the people of far-north Queensland, Lyn Warwick either failed in her representations or she just did not understand the needs of the Cairns region and her electorate. In fact, the far north had had \$130m slashed from its capital works projects from the preceding financial year, despite a record Budget for the whole of the State.

Mr Nuttall: Outrageous.

Dr CLARK: That is absolutely right. It was an outrageous response. However, did Lyn Warwick apologise? Did she express concern or regret about the Budget? She certainly did not. In fact, she said that she was happy with the Budget. She said that she did not believe the region had been neglected at all. Lyn Warwick said—

"I personally don't have any concerns because I have everything I wanted, basically, except perhaps a bit more schools maintenance."

She just wanted a few more schools painted. I can assure members that I wanted a lot more, and so did the people of Cairns and Barron River in the far north. What has happened? We have received a lot more because this time round, in this Budget, this Labor Government has acknowledged and has made commitments to far-north Queensland. On 13 June, the judgment of the people of Barron River was made evident, because they elected a representative who recognised those needs.

The difference between the Budget that was brought down in May and the Budget that we have now is very apparent. During the time between the coalition's Budget and this Budget, it became apparent that the Cairns Base Hospital was not properly funded, there was no proper staffing for the community health centres that were being built—they were just going to be empty shells without adequate staffing—and in relation to the convention centre, there was going to be only the extension to accommodate a basketball stadium without a proper Stage 2 extension so that the convention centre could be a world-class facility operating as both a stadium and a convention centre.

A Government member: They would not know what basketball was about.

Dr CLARK: As my colleague said, they would not know, and it is a disgrace. Those things have been addressed in the present Budget. We now have an extra \$7m for the extension of the Cairns Convention Centre so that we will have a world-class facility that will generate income for the Cairns economy. We have an extra \$17.5m on top of the \$21.5m promised by the coalition so that the Cairns

Base Hospital will function as the hospital that Labor planned when it was in Government previously. I can tell members that the staff of that hospital will now get what was promised to them. They understand that what they requested has been delivered by this Government.

The community health centres both in my electorate of Barron River and in the Mulgrave electorate will have the staffing that they need. When the Minister for Health took over that portfolio, the very first thing that she did was come up to Cairns and make a commitment for an extra \$300,000 for those staff—for therapists, for social workers, for dental staff. That was on top of the \$400,000 that had been allocated. The previous Government did only half the job. This Government has completed it.

I would like to mention some other developments in my electorate but, before I do that, I would like to put on record the excellent work that the member for Cairns has been doing in relation to the Cairns Base Hospital. We have always worked very, very closely to make sure that the Cairns Base Hospital was properly provided for. Of course, those are not the only initiatives that will affect both my electorate and Cairns. A sum of \$1m has been allocated for the initial work on the Cairns-Brisbane tilt train project, which will be of great benefit to my electorate; \$1.2m has been allocated to complete the lighting at Cazaly's AFL Park; and an amount of \$5m has been allocated to the Cairns Esplanade project.

To set the record straight, coverage of this Budget in the Cairns Post stated that, in addition to the first \$5m that we allocated, the Labor Party had committed \$4m. It is important to note that when Peter Beattie came to Cairns, he matched the initial \$5m that was pledged by the coalition but, in the last week, Joan Sheldon came to town and pledged another \$4m. I am sorry that the member for Gregory is not present, because members will remember that yesterday he said, "We never pork barrel", and the House erupted, quite rightly. What an amazing thing to try to make us believe! What Joan Sheldon did was pork-barrelling. We know that it was enough to make a commitment for \$5m and the Mayor of Cairns knows that. We will look at the issue again next year and will make a further commitment to the Esplanade project. Cairns City will not be disadvantaged by having \$5m allocated to that project this year.

I have outlined how the Budget will benefit Cairns. Of course, the electorates of Barron River to the north and Mulgrave to the south will also benefit from the provision of those central facilities.

Mr Swarten: Yorkey's Knob.

Dr CLARK: Yorkey's Knob will also benefit. The Minister for Public Works and Housing takes a special interest in Yorkey's Knob, which is situated in my electorate. The Minister has been of great help in my endeavours to have a house in Yorkey's Knob handed back to the council—a house that should have been handed back by the last Government. I thank the Minister for his support on that issue. I also thank the Minister for Police for his response to my representations to get a Police Beat in Trinity Beach.

Mr Swarten: It's a lot of hard work.

Dr CLARK: Yes, and that is where the last representative for Barron River was lacking. She talked about what she might do for police and about juvenile crime in the electorate, but that was all she did. There was talk but no action. We are getting a Police Beat.

Ms Spence: And the people recognise that.

Dr CLARK: The people do recognise the difference. I have a very close working relationship with the people of my electorate. We are working very well together to address those sorts of issues and we will continue to do that. We will work very productively together to address the issue of juvenile crime. I am very pleased with the initiatives in the Budget that address the problem of crime prevention and, with the funding provided, we will implement those projects very successfully.

Unfortunately, I do not have a lot more time to talk about the other initiatives in the Budget, except to say that I am pleased that the centrepiece of the Budget is jobs and job creation. Cairns will benefit from the target figure of 2,400 apprenticeships, traineeships and job placements. One of the ways that jobs will be created in Barron River under the Community Jobs Plan is through the Barron Gorge National Park master plan and walking track strategy. Long-term unemployed will be working to create facilities for tourists that will enhance the national park and produce a world-class facility. I look forward to being involved in those initiatives.
