



Speech by

**Mr M. ROWELL**

**MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK**

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Hansard 17 September 1998

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL  
APPROPRIATION BILL**

**Mr ROWELL** (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (4.21 p.m.): I rise to speak to the Appropriation Bill, which is an extremely important piece of legislation. At the moment the world economy is very unstable. Many of our trading partners are experiencing great difficulty. We are very dependent upon the soundness of the economies of our Asian trading partners—the Indonesians, the Koreans, the Japanese and so on. In the future we may have to look more to other countries—for example, Europe, the US and so on—for export opportunities.

Our exports are critical to the growth and the development of the State. Mineral and agricultural exports are major contributors to the Queensland economy. Currently, the share market is experiencing volatility; it is just like a roller-coaster. Just when people think there is some stability, the volatility returns. Over the past six months or so, billions of dollars have been written off the value of shares. That instability poses a major problem for Queensland and its economy which, as I said, depends heavily on exports. If jobs are to be created, our industries have to remain productive. Although we have growth in the State in a number of areas, our export economy is particularly important.

During 1997-98 we saw growth of 4.75%, which was a major plus. The former coalition Government played a major role in enhancing the wellbeing of many people throughout the State. Achieving economic growth takes time. The fact that we have one good year does not mean that the economy will necessarily continue to grow and create further job opportunities. These things take time. During 1997-98, employment growth was about 3.2%. Maintenance of that growth is extremely important for our future. However, irrespective of whichever side of politics is in power, I believe it will be difficult to maintain the growth rate that we had in Queensland over the past year.

There have been minimal changes to the coalition's Budget. That just goes to show that this Labor Government recognises that what we proposed was reasonable and fair. Certainly, there have been some adjustments here and there, but generally speaking the concept put forward in relation to growth and job prospects was by and large adhered to by the present Labor Government.

I wish to address a few areas of significance to my electorate and to speak about the support that it has received in the Budget. For example, schools need to be built in the electorate. The school at Goondi, which is in the northern part of the electorate, will benefit from the provision of a new building—a full general learning block—the total cost of which was about \$592,000, of which about \$430,000 will be provided in this financial year. The principal, Arthur Sclipa, will be pleased about that. I visited the school only a few weeks ago, towards the end of August. They were certainly ready to move to that block. I believe most of the money has been expended. That school now has a more solid footing. The existing temporary accommodation was very difficult for teachers and students to contend with.

I thank the former Attorney-General, Mr Beanland, who was involved in the allocation of \$750,000 for the provision of a lift at the Innisfail Court House. The external painting of that building has been completed, which is a great achievement during this wetter period of the year. I believe the internal painting will be completed over the next five to six weeks. The former Attorney-General recognised the needs of Innisfail when he made provision for the painting of that courthouse and the installation of a lift.

Mourilyan Harbour is a very important area on the coastal strip. A lot of sugar is produced from the mills from Babinda right down to Tully. Some of the mills in the Hinchinbrook Shire area send their molasses up to Mourilyan Harbour. The boat passage was dredged some years ago. The harbour itself is now being dredged. We will be able to provide additional wharves and generally improve the port so that other business can be conducted there. Some \$710,000 is being spent on that work, which was supported by both the coalition and the current Government.

Low sugar levels are causing desperate problems. The c.c.s. level in the northern region of the State is such that many farmers are doing it tough. When I was the Minister for Primary Industries, I was able to allocate \$300,000 over a three-year period to do something about that problem. I notice that the current Government has provided \$300,000. Just how that money will be expended is somewhat unclear. One set of documents speaks about north Queensland yields, yet another speaks about Queensland in general. Some confusion exists as to where that money is intended to be spent.

It is important that this problem of low sugar yields is recognised. It will be difficult to combat. We are currently experiencing low world sugar prices. Up till now we have been insulated through the single desk seller arrangement and our ability to sell our sugar on a forward basis. The prices that we are receiving for this year's crop are probably comparable to those we have received in the past. However, that will not be the case next year, because of the current extremely low prices. At present the harvesting conditions are terrible. It has been raining particularly heavily. Some areas have had up to 50 millimetres of rain in the past week to 10 days. Some northern areas have had up to 16 and 17 inches overnight. It is phenomenal weather. The farmers are certainly not unaccustomed to wet weather, and having it at this time of the year is making things extremely difficult.

Not only will it interrupt the sugar level and the harvesting, which is so critical, it will also cause major problems for next year's crop. When I was in the area recently, I saw fields totally inundated with water. It is highly likely that the germination from those fields will be particularly poor. With reduced prices, low sugar levels and so on next year, I think the area will do it particularly tough. It is hard to understand that areas with such good soil and rain levels can have such great difficulty in providing enough income for many families.

The Clump Point boat ramp is another initiative. To date, \$29,000 has been spent. A total of \$311,000 will be spent on this boat ramp in the very picturesque area of Mission Beach. From it you can look over to Dunk Island. It is probably one of the prize areas of the State in which to live. It boasts the islands, the reef and the hinterland, with rainforest and so on. It is an extremely popular area. The provision of these facilities is important for tourism. A lot of people come from the inland and spend a great deal of time at these locations. People from the mining industry come over when they are on leave. These types of facilities will certainly enhance the area and give an opportunity for many people to take advantage of this very pretty area of Queensland. Also, \$1m will be spent on a power feeder line to Mission Beach. The area is growing quite rapidly. It has a lot to offer, as I have said. We need those resources.

I fought for a long time for the Ingham TAFE facility. It dropped out of the Budget in the early 1990s, but we got it back on again and it is very pleasing to see that some \$3.7m will be spent by the State. \$800,000 is coming from the Hinchinbrook Shire Council. Of the State's funding, some \$2.715m will be spent in the next financial year. The foundations are being laid at present. Work did not stop, despite the wet weather. They have been digging the foundations out, pumping the water out of the trenches. I expect the pouring of those foundations to start very shortly.

Yanks Jetty on Orpheus Island is a pontoon with a walkway on to it. The jetty has been there for some time and, unfortunately, some of it has rusted out. It is now being reinstated by the Hinchinbrook Shire Council. I understand that on Monday tenders will be called for the reinstatement of that jetty. The area is certainly very picturesque. A lot of fish swim around that jetty. It is good landing point for people who just want some recreation. Instead of going on to the island, they can go to the jetty and sit on the benches and in the shade. It is a great facility for the boating public that uses those waters.

Roads are a major problem throughout the electorate. I have talked about the very heavy rain we have had recently, but early January was also quite wet. The roads are breaking up due to saturation. It is very difficult to keep any road in a reasonable condition with these enormous amounts of rain right throughout the year. Great difficulties are being experienced in relation to both council roads and the main highway. In fact, the shire had to increase its rating to the rural community to make sure road maintenance was covered.

The Tully area has similar problems. Massive expansions are occurring there. B-doubles and semitrailers are travelling something like 100 kilometres along the highway to bring sugarcane from the southern area around Cardwell right through to Mourilyan mill and South Johnstone mill. I note that there are problems with the road around the El Arish area. A road that looked to be in a very good condition last year is starting to break up. The coalition provided something like \$20m in a sugar package to address this situation, but because of the rapid growth of the area, and considering its

valuable contribution to Queensland's economy, I think it needs extra recognition. I believe we need a good road system there. I do not think we have an alternative. There are B-doubles travelling on the same roads as school buses. There are wooden bridges that do not have the capacity to carry the loads. Very often when a cane harvester loaded on a low loader has to go over a wooden bridge, the cane harvester has to come off while the semitrailer and prime mover drive across the bridge and then the harvester is walked across and reloaded. It is a situation that might be expected in the Third World. It is very disappointing that this sort of thing is happening right throughout north Queensland. The Johnstone Shire has something like 40 wooden bridges. A lot of those bridges were built a long time ago. Suddenly we are seeing a massive change in harvesting practices, and the mode of transport used for the cane crop.

Another important issue is the SIIP package funding. This was brought in during 1993-94, during a Federal election. Some \$40m was provided for that package. I recall that \$19m came from Queensland and \$19m came from the Federal Government. That was to do a great deal of work in sugar growing areas right throughout Queensland. Believe it or not, there is a lot of design work to finish. Areas such as Loder Creek, Mandam and Ripple Creek need this work done. The recent heavy rain has made it particularly difficult for those farmers to get their crops off and to plant next year's crop. There is a similar situation in the Riversdale/Murray area. We want to get that project up and running because of much the same problem that I am talking about in the Ingham district.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier in North Queensland, Mike Reynolds, was in my area the other day. I wrote to the Premier about the problems we are having, which have been exacerbated by an unnatural season. There is little question about that. With the sugar industry, there is a cycle. Growers do not simply plant a crop and plough it out the next year. If that cycle is interrupted, substantial losses can occur. That is exactly what is happening at present. People cannot harvest; they cannot plant. It is too late to plant now. The crops have been inundated. Production in the next year and beyond certainly will be severely impeded.

We need to address the situation where a package has been provided but is being held up by the planning and design work and the rigmarole of advertising, and letting every man and his dog have an opportunity to say whether they like the scheme. We get a lot of criticism from the green movement over what we are doing. I think it is important for the State that we get those projects to a point of completion and deliver the type of relief that they were originally designed to provide.

I will go quickly through some issues relating to the Department of Primary Industries. As mentioned by the member for Crows Nest, there has been a reduction in the heliothis funding program. It is down to \$2.38m from \$4.25m. There are major problems throughout the cotton and grain growing areas of western Queensland. If we cannot stem the problem of heliothis—there are a number of measures that DPI can look at—there is a prospect that the \$600m crop could be severely affected. There is a range of other grain crops that are severely affected by heliothis. The Dry Tropics Research Station, which the coalition announced in the last Budget with an allocation of \$3.5m, is going ahead. The area has enormous potential. Bowen is an area that is ideally suited to growing a range of horticultural crops.

I would like to go on very quickly to some of the things that the coalition was doing in Government. The Callide/Dawson Centre, which is an extension of the Biloela Centre, was opened at a cost of \$2m. It is very important to the cotton, wheat, barley and sorghum breeding program. Midge resistance was one of the key projects undertaken by the centre. I also turned the sod at the Wacol Tick Fever Research Centre. That project was worth some \$5.3m. The vaccination process has a benefit of something like \$20m. I believe it is very important that we have such a facility for animals to which ticks are attracted. It is important that we create some resistance by way of vaccines.

The Mareeba Conference Centre was established at a cost of \$1m. This was established in association with AQIS. That centre is vitally important to the north. We were working very well with Northwatch. The Federal and State Governments worked in conjunction on that program. I was also involved with the Climate Control Centre, which was established at a cost of \$15m. Some \$7.5m will be provided to this centre over three years. The live cattle trade—

Time expired.

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