



Speech by

BRUCE DAVIDSON

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

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1999 STATE BUDGET

Mr DAVIDSON (Noosa—LP) (4.32 p.m.): A sure sign of a Premier out of control is a Premier who, when confronted by an almost insurmountable obstacle, runs around blaming everybody but himself for the position he finds himself in, particularly at Budget time. Is it any wonder that sections of the media now refer to the acting Treasurer and Premier as "Mr Bleattie"? Then again, he is not out of tune with those other fine Labor economists who have done so much for Australia.

We all recall the prowess of that mighty Labor icon the great Gough when it came to economic management. We all remember well the mess the great Gough, with help from Jim Cairns and Juni, left us in when the loans affair hit the fan and that team of mental giants was promptly moved to stage left before any more major economic damage could be inflicted on the Australian people. And who could forget John Cain, followed by the polka dot princess, former Victorian Premier Joan Kirner, who left Victoria bereft of any credit credence from Standard and Poor's? Is it any wonder that Jeff Kennett cannot be dislodged?

Not to be left out, along came John Bannon in South Australia who, just to keep the Labor record alive, managed to leave the place a total rust bucket, economically and politically. And of course, who could forget the last Labor Prime Minister with his comments "this will bring home the bacon", his more famous "this is the recession we had to have" and, ominously and prophetically if this Budget is the best we can do for Queenslanders, the equally infamous "banana republic" jibe?

What a team of mental and economic giants, all of whom had that remarkable ability to blame everyone else for their inefficiencies. And now, up here in God's country we have "Blabbermouth Pete", who has had more Budget leaks in the last couple of weeks than a busload of drunken footballers.

We appreciate that it has not been easy trying to run two big departments at once, with the appointed Treasurer out trying to get a bet on the Internet. But this is the man who out of his own mouth said, "We can do." If this Budget is the best he can do, then the people of Queensland can now run out and reserve a spot on the Labor bunglers honour board for the Premier and acting Treasurer, just above Joan Kirner and just under that other renowned Treasurer and french clock genius, the porker of all porkers, Paul Keating.

All over this State people are crying out for more police and police resources. What do we get from the brains trust opposite? A new dog squad to keep the football hooligans coming to the Olympic soccer under control and free of explosives! That goes down particularly well in my divisional area of Coolum, where the police are still so impoverished that the local chamber of commerce had to supply the station with a 15 year old fax machine to keep police in touch with their colleagues. But I suppose that the Coolum officers do not have time to be sending faxes to anyone. If we consider all of the officers assigned to the station—that is, a possible four on duty out of the seven who make up the entire staff—there is one policeman to more than 2,500 residents, such is the increase in population in Coolum.

Honourable members can just imagine how pleased the residents of the Coolum district will be when they learn that there is no money to build them a much-needed new police station in the central business district but there is a stray \$1m available to re-flush the old Woolloongabba Police Station for a few soccer games next year. I presume the restaurant and eventually an art gallery, which are the usual result for heritage buildings, will pay for this extraordinary largesse.

We can but hope that the \$50m Premier Pete tells us the games will bring to Brisbane—and he will not need Gocorp's net bet to get on—stays long enough in Queensland to provide the Noosa Police Station with enough funds to bring the officer strength up to 1993 levels, when there were 32 uniformed police in the area.

As of this Budget week, 40,000 people live in the Noosa Shire, where at any one time 14 police out of a possible 26 have the task of protecting the residents. Given the twaddle he has presented as a Budget in this House, the acting Treasurer's sums are obviously not up to scratch so I will do the arithmetic for him. This represents one active policeman for every 2,850 residents.

I do not want to get the Minister for Police overexcited, so I will admit that there will be three first-term constables available periodically to this understaffed station. "Understaffed" is putting it mildly. That should make the citizens of Queensland and Noosa feel much more secure, day and night! With a bit of luck, we might even see them down at the Hastings Street shopfront occasionally. It is to be hoped that these three young people starting out in a new career will not be as devastated at the lack of resources, which this Budget has not addressed, as are the residents of my electorate about the wastage the Budget proposes elsewhere.

Within the parameters of this Budget, the "jobs, jobs, jobs" mantra of the Premier continues to be sung. With the population of my electorate increasing faster than in any seats held by the Premier's flock opposite, one might have assumed that the Premier's promise to govern for all Queenslanders might have raised its credentials in this Budget. For those Queensland residents living in my electorate, such is not the case.

Back in 1997 we were hoping that there would be a commitment for a special education facility at Noosaville State School. To date this facility has been housed at Tewantin State School, which is entirely unsuitable for the task because of such problems as inappropriately designed and sized toilets, the absence of any outdoor play facilities and inappropriate design of classroom areas in terms of floor coverings and wet play areas, to name just a few of the problems.

Since 1997 the school principal and I have endeavoured to have this facility prioritised as urgent. Again in 1998 the school principal wrote to the school planning facilities area seeking urgent and immediate priority for this development. As of 23 August this year, well into the Budget planning period, the principal and I were advised—

"This need was identified in the action plan—Education Service Provision for Students with Special Needs 1998-2002—and has been recognised as a priority project on the 1998-99 Capital Works Program. You should be aware of action presently being taken to progress planning and documentation of this facility."

Honourable members would think we should all be elated with this response, but if they were, as we were, they would be wrong. Amongst the billions being spent on dog squads and to refurbish old police stations, Noosaville State School has been advised that a small sum has been set aside for design consultation for this well overdue and very necessary special education disability centre that would satisfy the needs for disabled young folk from Coolumb to Pomona and all the areas in between. Perhaps we should be talking to the Lang Park Trust to see if it could apply a little more influence on "Mr Bleattie" than we and the children appear to be able to.

Whilst on the subject of schools and in keeping with the "jobs, jobs, jobs" mantra, the matter of TAFE colleges raises its head. If we are to be the Smart State—the temporary Treasurer keeps telling us that we are going to be—then this form of education is vital. But apparently it is not vital enough for the young people of the Noosa electorate, who have a very nice sign on the land set aside for a TAFE college but no indication in this Budget about when they can expect to be enlightened to Smart State levels and thus become contributors to our economy.

We have heard much in this Budget about this Government's concern about the environment and its contribution to the welfare of our green heritage. One of this State's most used national parks is the Noosa National Park, through which over a million people a year walk and run to keep fit and enjoy the beauty of Queensland, especially Noosa Heads. This is a place for all Queenslanders to be proud of—or at least they should be—but a quiet walk through this park will very quickly reveal that the politicians with the purse strings do not share that vision.

The coalition Government spent money on the parking area and initial walking area to beautify the approach to the park for the many people who use it, both visitors and locals. But past the initial walkway areas the deterioration of the walking tracks and pathways is such that if immediate attention is not applied to these areas we will see some badly injured tourists in this park in the near future. The local park staff do a magnificent job in keeping the park open with the meagre funds available to them, but they cannot do the impossible.

If the temporary Treasurer and his Minister are for real about jobs, then there is plenty of scope for employment in this and, I am informed, other parks in this State. One does not have to be a

Rhodes scholar—even one in some disgrace—to know that national parks bring a whole lot more by way of tourist dollars to Queensland than very expensive and misplaced footy grounds.

On the subject of things natural and of nature, and the possibility of funding real jobs, can the Minister for Natural Resources find some money in his budget allocation to bring to a head the matter of management of the Noosa River? Years of chaos on who has the final say in our river management have resulted in total mismanagement of the Noosa River system. There have been management plans kicked hither and yon by the Noosa council and various Government departments for years, with no outcome in sight. This is probably true of every other river system in this State, but I can tell members from personal experience that, in the case of the Noosa River, it is the river and its ecological importance to Noosa and Queensland that is at stake here.

Control of that superb river is vested in the hands of a number of Government departments, with the result that no-one will take responsibility for doing anything about the proper management of that wonderful waterway. The Noosa council has some very definite ideas about what should be the proper approach to the river's needs, and it has had a plan sitting in various Government offices for what seems ages. Because of this endless delay, it is almost impossible to achieve even the simplest of management programs. Even the simplest of decisions, such as who is responsible for removing a derelict hulk rotting and polluting the river on the north shore riverbank—and deteriorating even further daily—appears to be out of the reach of any responsible authority. It is only a matter of time before that back-broken wreck comes apart and pollutes our pristine waterway. Yet because there is no central management body to give a direction, this, it would appear, is to be the river's fate. Add to this the continuing argument about where and when the council might dredge the sand-clogged river entrance area, particularly to replenish Main Beach, and the entire problem then reaches the status of farce.

Tourism is the major job provider in my electorate of Noosa, and if someone on the Government benches does not put some money into providing a solution to the problem of managing the Noosa River, then we will lose tourists and tourist dollars and thus many more job opportunities. I am not talking about money in the mega sums splashed about in this Budget; just a small amount of money combined with commonsense to overcome an ongoing and irresponsible clash of egos which, up to now, has frustrated the origination of a one-unit management authority of the Noosa River system. In the light of the jobs that the continuation of this problem will cause to be lost—to say nothing of the ecological degradation in the river that this intransigence assists—will the temporary Treasurer give some funds to someone to overcome, once and for all, this serious environmental management problem?

Whilst I am on the subject of waterways, another problem that faces my electorate is the flooding of Eumundi Road every time it rains more than a few drops, as has been the case this year. As anybody who has been to Noosa knows, Eumundi Road is one of the major access roads to the community and is the main access road from the motorway. It is also the major arterial road for our industrial area. Thus its importance to the community is immense. However, just west of the industrial area and in the midst of the Tewantin State Forest is a low spot that causes traffic mayhem because of its tendency to flood at the slightest drop of rain. It will not take much in the way of time or money to overcome that problem, just some consideration and willpower.

Whilst on the subject of Eumundi Road—one of the State's worst black spots on our north-south highway is situated at the intersection of the Bruce Highway and Eumundi Road. On behalf of the hundreds of motorists who use that intersection every hour, when, may I ask, will the funds necessary to correct that life-taking road hazard be forthcoming? I am aware that money does not grow on trees, and I am very aware that Governments do have certain priorities that need to be considered as absolutely essential. But if my meagre entreaties on behalf of the people who live in the Noosa electorate are to be disregarded due to a supposed lack of funds, I make a small suggestion to the Premier as to how to correct this imbalance in the State's coffers: take a pruning knife to the employment levels in the departments of various Ministers, particularly those who believe that inefficiency can be replaced simply by turning on the people tap.

As an example of the people game and the inefficiency that it promotes—to say nothing of the cost—Minister Spence has more than 800 people picking up paper and administering all of the various tasks that her portfolios require. However, Mr Speaker, in the unlikely possibility of you wanting to start up a business and thus possibly employing some people, let me tell you what awaits you. Before you can start up a business and open a bank account to conduct the finances of that business, you must register a business name. "No big deal", you might think. But if you did, you would be wrong.

Mr Speaker, when you ring the number listed in all the department's literature about business name listing, this is what you get: "We are unable to take your application over the phone, but if you apply in writing your application will be placed in a queue for our attention." When you then send in your written application, be prepared to wait in this queue for, currently, about three to four weeks, before you can get the business name back so that you can get the business under way.

If we multiply this experience by the hundreds of people who want to start up a business in Queensland every week and, further, consider what an effect this would have on unemployment, then we might just believe that a bit of efficiency at the Department of Equity and Fair Trading would not go astray. If this small iota of efficiency was perpetrated throughout every department, the savings might be just enough for every Queenslander to benefit from the Government's Budget, and not just the Labor mates. We can only wait in hope.
