



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

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1999 STATE BUDGET

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (5.41 p.m.): I am very pleased to support the Appropriation Bills as they reflect a Budget for Queensland that is solid and progressive. So often politicians are accused of being concerned only about their chances at the next election and concerned only about pleasing the electorate in the short term rather than looking after the broader needs of the State for the longer term. This Budget has the courage to consider the future, particularly the future for young Queenslanders. It is also a Budget on which we should congratulate David Hamill on his very hard work over this past year. We in Queensland now have an accrual-based Budget. I am sure that David Hamill and his staff spent many months working hard to bring the Budget to fruition.

It is a great Budget, because its emphasis is on regional development, capital works and jobs. As the media in my area has said exactly, that is good news for the north. I admit that, since the Premier and acting Treasurer announced the details of the Budget, I have been smiling and very pleased, because there is much in the Budget for not only Cairns but also the far-north Queensland region—in fact, for all of the regions throughout this State.

I recognise particularly the special funding that has been allocated to regional and rural communities for community infrastructure— \$50m—and the \$39m that will be released for the Heritage Trails Network. That will contribute to very important upgrading programs in the towns and cities around Queensland and allow each of those towns and cities to suit themselves—to put in the kind of infrastructure that is best suited to their needs at this time. I am pleased, too, to see that the regional community forums are to be increased with further funding this year of \$7.5m. Disaster mitigation—getting ahead of cyclones and floods and taking action to mitigate against disaster—is allocated in the Budget to the tune of \$4m. Certainly, that will be of benefit to the far north. Of course, there is also the continued funding through the Department of State Development for regional economic development corporations— \$250,000 annually. The Cairns Regional Economic Development Corporation, which is doing such great work, will be pleased to have that money confirmed.

I must say, too, that the Budget contains so much that is beneficial for the Cape York Peninsula. That the needs of that area are addressed in this Budget is undoubtedly in large part due to the good work of the local member, Steve Bredhauer, who is also our Minister for Transport. I pay tribute to him and also to the other Ministers who clearly, if members look at the Budget papers, have thought about those families who are in some hardship, those families who are in need, and the children who live in the Cape York communities. Certainly, that consideration is apparent in the portfolios of Employment, Education, Mines and Energy, Health, sport and recreation, Housing and, of course, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs. Although I represent the Cairns electorate, the health and prosperity of Cairns is inevitably tied to the health of the region. Therefore, we have a strong connection with the people of Cape York.

Capital works is important to the far north, and 54% of this Budget's capital works allocation is to be spent in areas outside Brisbane. That is indeed a fine figure for us to be able to talk about in the regions of Queensland because, very often, there has been the perspective that the south-east corner, the metropolitan area, gets the goodies. Certainly in this Budget a large proportion of this spending is distributed well around the State.

I notice, too, that the per capita spending by region is highest in western Queensland. So it should be. In those areas where the population is sparse, the infrastructure is more costly per capita. However, that is appropriate. Nonetheless, I looked in the Budget at the per capita spending for the far north. I was pleased to see that, appropriately also, it is slightly higher than the per capita spending average for Queensland.

Some major capital works for Cairns are allocated in the Budget. These facilities will not only certainly benefit the city area but also the broader urban region. An amount of \$9m has been allocated to contribute towards the council's esplanade project, which will see our world famous esplanade in Cairns more stylish and comfortable, and offering just that bit more in facilities over the next few years. An amount of \$8.2m has been allocated for the completion of the second stage of the Convention Centre, the basketball court for our national basketball team, the Taipans, which will also serve as an entertainment centre and will allow the world's artists to entertain us in the far north.

A very important \$9.2m has been allocated for the next stage of the redevelopment of the Cairns Base Hospital. We have been particularly pleased with the opening of the new building at the Cairns Base Hospital, Block C, which now houses our theatres, intensive care, women's health, X-ray and radiology as well as medical records and emergency. With this allocation of \$9.2m will begin the refurbishment of the two main existing buildings on that site—buildings that are out of date. Although we now have the funds to devote to undertaking the refurbishment, it will nonetheless be difficult for the staff who will have to work and provide their typical high-quality service during the renovations.

I was pleased, too, that the Minister for Health has announced a further contribution of \$7m towards the James Cook University medical school. This innovative medical school, which will take in students both at the beginning of a six-year course as well as at stages along the way, will be split across the James Cook University campuses of Townsville and Cairns and be based at the Townsville General Hospital as well as at the Cairns Base Hospital.

The Budget made important announcements in relation to infrastructure. I was, of course, so pleased to see the allocation for the Redlynch deviation—\$2.495m. The completion of the new Redlynch road—the bypass—will make it so much easier for the people from the north and the north-western parts of Cairns to get into town. However, it is a pity that we will not see the money for the upgrading of the southern approach to Cairns. The traffic problems in that area are severe, particularly in the mornings. The problem is not that our own Minister for Transport has not set aside that funding; the Federal funding that is required is not programmed for another two or three years. Despite clear observation, many complaints and reports to the member for Leichhardt, he has not succeeded in bringing his Government's attention to this cooperative project to relieve the southern transport problems for the people of the southern suburbs of Cairns. However, we will continue to pursue this matter loudly.

I am also pleased to see an allocation of \$30m to build the tilt trains, which will eventually come to Cairns. We have heard of the success of the tilt train service to Rockhampton. Also, \$40m has been announced to begin the line upgrades for those tilt trains. The line will be upgraded to Townsville. The combination of those allocations will bring the line upgrades and trains to Townsville. We look forward to allocations in further Budgets that will complete that project and, eventually, welcome the tilt trains, and the very many tourists who will travel on them, to Cairns.

I notice, too, in the small print of the Transport budget that \$5m has been allocated for transport customer service centres. Unfortunately, Cairns is one of those places where the service has sometimes not been at its best because the customer service centres have been so busy. These additional funds will relieve that congestion and provide a better service to our customers.

An amount of \$12.5m in capital works has been provided to the Cairns Port Authority and, in terms of energy, we are also well looked after. Powerlink will reinforce Stage 2 of the transmission line project with the allocation of \$637,000, and that will be continued in the next Budget.

I am pleased to see the reintroduction of rebates for householders who install solar hot water systems. While we worry about the Statewide picture in the Budget, it is important to remember that we need to work at the individual householder level, not only in providing services but also in offering the infrastructure that is suited to our modern world. My compliments go to the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing for the provision of \$500,000 in his budget to research sustainable technologies and to provide employment in fields that are aimed at reducing greenhouse emissions.

One particular announcement of great importance to Cairns is the provision of \$300,000 by the Department of Torres Strait Islander Policy for a diversionary centre in Cairns. We have long had a problem with homeless people in the streets of Cairns and with public drunkenness. Sometimes those two problems have combined. Previous Governments have talked about action. My compliments go to the Minister because now we can go through the proper process of consulting with all of the stakeholders to find the right placement for the diversionary centre, acquire the land and begin the planning. We expect that in future years the capital works to build the centre will become available.

This is part of a whole-of-Government program in Cairns. I pay particular tribute to the Minister for Employment, whose staff involved in the Community Jobs Plan have assisted with the provision of fencing in some key areas. I also pay tribute to the police who have ensured the security of residents who have, on occasion, had their peace disrupted or threatened by people who are drunk and behaving badly. In each instance we have worked across Government to solve this problem in the short term as well as for the longer term.

The announcement by the Minister for Police of a new Police Beat in the Cairns central business district is also welcomed. Along with the provision of \$10m from the budget of the Minister for State Development for the revitalisation of the city centre for Cairns, this will provide a new face for the city as we approach the new century. Within that program particular moneys have been allocated to heritage, arts and culture and landscaping projects, which will also provide extra jobs in the city of Cairns.

I recognise that 40% of the operating expenditure in this Budget is for Health and Education, and so it should be. I particularly recognise the growth in Health programs and the initiation of new Health programs. The Budget provides \$9.2m for the redevelopment of the hospital, \$450,000 for the provision of two extra beds and nine staff in the ICU at the Cairns Base Hospital and an increase of \$3m in alcohol and drug funding. My compliments go to the Minister for Justice for the provision of \$1m for the drugs court. There will be an increase in funding of \$12m for home and community care for elderly and disabled people to assist them in their own homes and \$3.5m for the School Nurses program—a program that was initiated some years ago in the Cairns area. In general, the Health budget is up by 6%, which allows us to continue to provide more and more services in an area that is probably of greatest interest to the people of Queensland.

In working across Government, I give recognition to the importance of the appointment of a project officer from Health in the liquor licensing division. That officer will work on responsible serving practices for alcohol. Working across Government and linking with other departments is a feature of this Budget. The training of youth workers and youth peer leaders in the early identification of and intervention in drug and alcohol problems is of great importance.

Housing is another matter of great importance in the far north. The region has been given a budget of \$13.2m for public housing, which will provide 12 detached houses and 59 medium-density houses. Undoubtedly we will share in the \$22m being provided Statewide for the upgrading of kitchens, bathrooms and security in public housing. We will also share in the \$5m being provided for special upgrades of public housing for tenants who have a disability.

Of course, a very important program for Cairns is the Manoora community and urban renewal project. I am pleased that the Minister has announced that \$4.05m will be provided in next year's spending. A sum of \$3m will be provided for urban renewal, which includes the upgrade of 60 houses. A sum of \$1.05m will be provided for programs that are driven by the community and are focused particularly on the children of the Manoora community. I am pleased to say that the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Racing has signalled that Cairns could hope to share in the \$10m that is available through the community sports facilities programs, which will particularly benefit the children of the Manoora area and others in Cairns.

Along with other members of the House, I give particular recognition to the importance of the information technology budget to achieving the targets that this Government has been brave enough to set. In our public schools there are currently 10 children per computer, and we aim to reduce that figure to 7.5 children per computer in 2001 and, eventually, to five children per computer. Of course we first need to have in place networking and infrastructure, as well as software packages and training for teachers. On its own, the hardware is of no benefit. Much of the initial spending will go towards the provision of infrastructure, which is indeed appropriate.

I am pleased to hear that \$12.4m will be devoted to school maintenance. As many of our schools in the far north have older buildings we are conscious of the need for maintenance funding. A sum of \$5m will be provided for literacy and numeracy programs and \$5m for behaviour management. Funding will be provided also for university level studies in computing and research into biotechnology. A sum of \$55m will be provided for research into cancer. I am pleased to see that the Tropical North Queensland Institute of TAFE will be given an extra \$500,000 to upgrade its courses in information technology.

The information technology industry in Cairns will be particularly pleased with this Budget. We have identified this as an area of competitive advantage in which we already have considerable local expertise. Many jobs will flow from the various Government IT projects such as schools projects, tertiary projects and the projects administered by the Minister for Communication and Information that upgrade Government infrastructure. I compliment the Minister for his continuing emphasis on providing access to information technology for the broader public across Queensland. I applaud the intention of the Minister

for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations to devote 200 traineeships in the public sector to information technology.

I am pleased that an extra \$3m will be provided over the next year to market tourism for Queensland, which will help to mitigate the potential effects of the GST. A considerable number of jobs will come to Cairns as a result.

The best thing about this Budget is jobs, jobs, jobs for teachers, police, nurses, health professionals, emergency service workers, child protection workers, construction industry workers, small businesspeople and subcontractors. Statewide 2,400 new public sector traineeships will be created and allocation for 500 apprentice positions will be continued, and Cairns will have its share.

Special programs will also be provided for under the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle's \$80.8m budget to assist those who have been unemployed for the long term. A sum of \$22.9m will be provided under the Community Jobs Plan and \$33.7m under the Community Employment Assistance program. Again, Cairns will have its share. The Budget also provides incentives to the private sector to create jobs in areas of skills shortages and these programs add up to \$5m. This means that there will be a lot happening in Cairns. Many people will be working and others will be in training. Cairns really will be moving a step ahead, thanks to this Budget.

Thanks also needs to go to our regional public servants who have worked very hard over the last year. For the benefit of the powers that be in Brisbane, they have summarised the present situation in Cairns and the far north. They have presented solid and factual information to show why the additional programs that have in fact been funded in this Budget are needed in Cairns. I give recognition to their silent but nonetheless very important work in the interests of the far north.

There is no doubt that this Budget is good for the north, not only for the present but also for the future. It lays the building blocks for future gain, particularly for the children in our fair State. In the end, it is a Budget about jobs, education and the future. My compliments go to the Treasurer.
