



Speech by

JEFF SEENEY

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

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APPROPRIATION BILL
Estimates Committee C
Report

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (4.29 p.m.): I commend the honourable member for Rockhampton on his keenness, but I can assure him that his chance will come later in the day. It is my pleasure to make a contribution to this debate on the report of Estimates Committee C. In particular, I would like to make some comments about the budgetary allocations that were contained in the Budget documents that related to Main Roads and, in particular, capital works. Obviously, with a large rural electorate, capital works funding for Main Roads is one of the first items that I look at in a Budget. It is one of the things that receives the most attention from those of us who represent those types of electorates.

As was well and truly illustrated in the speeches that were made following the presentation of the Budget documents, it is extremely disappointing to everyone who lives in rural areas to see the extent to which the capital works funding for roads has been cut. My electorate has the misfortune to be overlapped by three different regions of Main Roads. Just about every area across the State has been cut. Certainly the three areas that overlap my electorate have been cut—none more so than central Queensland.

Much development is going on in the central Queensland area, but it is an area where the roads have always been substandard; it is an area which had a large amount of money ploughed into it by the coalition Government—by the former Transport Minister, the member for Gregory. A large amount of money was put into that area—and quite rightly so—to try to bring it up to scratch, to try to cater for the large mining and agricultural development projects that are going on there and to bring the transport network in that area of Queensland up to some sort of acceptable level.

When one looks at this Budget, one sees that the expenditure has been cut from \$235m to \$133m, a cut of \$100m. The Minister can sit over there and shake his head. The figures are in the Budget. No matter how much he tries to twist them and hide them, the figures are in the Budget.

Mr Bredhauer: Unfortunately, you can't read.

Mr SEENEY: He is the master of the half-truth. He talks about the road funding being increased and he talks about extra funding. But in reality that is not what is happening out there and he knows it. He has an obligation to the councils out there to make them aware of what the actual situation is. In central Queensland the funding was cut by \$100m, a 40% cut in an area where he could quite easily have spent an extra \$100m without any problem at all. He could have spent an extra \$100m there and it certainly would not have done the whole job. He has cut \$100m out of an area of Queensland that badly needed extra road funding.

In the eastern side of my electorate—in the Wide Bay side—the funding was cut from \$195m to \$162m, a \$33m cut. That is still a huge cut, but it is nowhere near the cut that the central Queensland division suffered. The total funding across the State for capital works as near as I can reckon has been reduced by \$170m, yet the Minister appears before the Estimates committee and tries to twist the figures and make it appear as though the funding has actually been increased.

As I said before, the least he owes those rural councils is honesty, a clear indication of what the future holds for them. They are out there at the moment trying to work out how they are going to fund next year's council budgets, given that a lot of Main Roads projects have been extended or cut in

half—half have been pushed into the next year so that he does not have to provide them with funding this year but still put across the message that he is continuing to fund them on an annual basis, which is the guarantee that we gave them. That was the guarantee that the coalition Government gave them. That was the guarantee that the member for Gregory gave them. The Minister is fudging the figures. He is fudging the situation and he is just not being fair dinkum with those councils, and I think that is a tragedy.

The other thing that is causing a great deal of uncertainty not just in this department but right across all the departments that operate in rural areas is the 6% equity tax, how that is to be applied and how it will affect future capital expenditure across a whole range of areas. It is something that I believe the Minister needs to address very urgently with a lot of the shire councils that depend on Main Roads funding. How will that 6% equity tax—that 6% tax that the Premier referred to as a bonus in some sort of twisted logic, but it is a tax—impact on the amounts of money that the councils get from his department?

Mr Bredhauer: Read what your shadow Minister said about it in his contribution.

Mr SEENEY: He is the Minister and I am suggesting to him that it is his responsibility to make the situation clear.

Time expired.
