



Speech by

Dr LESLEY CLARK

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

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1999 STATE BUDGET

Dr CLARK (Barron River—ALP) (10.31 p.m.): History will record the Beattie Labor Government's Budget handed down this week as marking a turning point for Queensland. History will record that, at the very end of the 20th century, the Labor Party laid the foundation to transform Queensland from a quarry and a farm into a technological and intellectual hub of the South-East Asia region.

Unlike the coalition, which continues to live in the past, the Labor Party recognises that the industries of tomorrow are the knowledge-based industries. We are committed to making Queensland the Smart State by providing strategies and strategic investments that will develop Queensland's human capital with record expenditure on education and training programs to buy skills, knowledge and attitudes required in the information economy. It will nurture emerging knowledge-based industries such as biotechnology through historic investment in the research infrastructure of Queensland. It will promote the development of the communications and information industry to provide sustainable, highly valued employment. It will develop an industry culture focused on innovation and the production and adaptation of our research and knowledge for commercial purposes through cooperative research centres and technology incubators. It will foster culture expression which brings new audiences together, and expand the access to new ideas through the use of interactive multimedia technologies. Finally, it will enhance the effectiveness of Government service delivery to Queenslanders through the use of new technologies.

In Wednesday's Courier-Mail, John Wanna, the Associate Professor of Politics at Griffith University, described the strategy as a brave political gamble. He said—

"Peter Beattie is taking a calculated political risk in his mid-term Budget. He has chosen to invest long-term in knowledge-based jobs in the future—hoping to pick winners and lay the foundation of a future jobs boom.

Politicians are often attacked for reacting only to the immediate concerns of the day. This Budget is anything but a knee-jerk response. It pushes the political agenda out to 10 to 20 years and advocates a new 'industry policy' commitment to sunrise technologies. As Beattie argued, the Budget 'propels Queensland into the New Age'. Hype perhaps, but the Premier should be applauded for having the courage of his convictions and having a go."

Risky it may be, but it is a risk that Queensland cannot afford not to take if we want to be a prosperous State in the next century.

The Labor Budget will also be regarded as a turning point for regional Queensland because, for the first time, more than half of the \$5.2 billion capital works budget will be spent outside the south-east corner of the State. Similarly, over half of the current record \$5.3 billion five-year Roads Implementation Plan will be spent in the regions. There is also \$10m for a new Regional Centres program to bring new life to cities outside the metropolitan area.

The distribution of resources is a recognition on the part of the Government that the wealth of the State's economy as a whole is dependent upon the health of the regional economies. Also, and most importantly, the Government recognises that the people living in the State's regions are those best placed to identify and prioritise the issues relevant to their communities, and \$7.5m has been provided to support the eight ministerial regional forums that facilitate this process. I attended the first

community forum in Cairns earlier this year, and I am looking forward to the Government's response at the next forum to the issues and ideas that were raised in Cairns.

As other members have pointed out this afternoon, it is a Budget that will continue to create jobs. Some 41,000 jobs are predicted to be created as a result of this Budget, bringing our unemployment level down to some 7.75% and on target to meet our 5% unemployment rate.

The success of the Government's Budget strategy in Cairns has been recognised by community leaders. The headline in the Cairns Post on Wednesday summed up the situation—"Budget Good for the North". It went on to outline the projects that confirm the Government's commitment to the Cairns region. I might highlight some of those big Budget items, namely: \$30m for the Cairns tilt trains; \$13.5m to expand Lotus Glen prison; \$12.47m for the Cairns Port Authority; \$13.2m for public housing; \$9.2m for the further development of the Cairns Base Hospital; \$9m for the Esplanade redevelopment project; \$8.2m for the continuation of work on the Cairns Convention Centre basketball court; \$7m for the James Cook University Medical School to be shared between Cairns and Townsville; \$5.75m for the Wet Tropics Management Authority; \$4.9m for community health facilities; \$4.05m for the Manoora Urban and Community Project; and \$2.4m for work on the Bentley Park State High School at Edmonton. Those are just the big Budget items. There is a whole range of other things. No wonder the Leader of the Opposition—who is from the Gold Coast—complained that it is all going to Cairns! But in fact it is not all going to Cairns.

Mr Cooper: It sounds like you are going pretty well.

Dr CLARK: We are going very well, but it is spread throughout the region—it is not just in Cairns. I do not mind admitting that we are doing very well, because this Government recognises the significance of far-north Queensland. The leaders of our community recognise that—as does the member for Crows Nest.

The next day the headlines continued to be positive—"Funds to Fire up FNQ". The newspaper reported as follows—

"The State Budget has delivered a shot of confidence to Cairns by maintaining funds for key inner city projects and overseas tourism promotion', business leaders said yesterday.

'The provision of ongoing funding for redevelopments of the Esplanade, Cityport Wharf area and the central business district could only be seen as a stimulus', Northern Industry Development Association chairman Russell Board said.

'We see these as keystone projects for Cairns—there's a lot at stake with them because they will have a big impact on the confidence of property developers,' Mr Board said.

'They will act as a very positive stimulus and will probably lead to further private investment.'

That is something which this Government is aiming to achieve. The article continues—

"Cairns Mayor and Local Government Association of Queensland president Tom Pyne also welcomed the regional centre funds as well as increased funding for disaster management programs, and maintained spending in the key areas of roads, water and sewerage.

'It is a solid Budget for which the State Government should be congratulated,' Cr Pyne said."

It was wonderful to see Mayor Tom Pyne recognising the contribution that this Government has made. Mr Pyne has always been prepared to give credit where credit is due, and he has done that for the Government. The article goes on—

"Tourism Tropical North Queensland general manager Ian Kean said extra funds for overseas marketing would help the region maintain its presence on the world stage."

The tourism industry in far-north Queensland is beginning to look up again after the difficult times of the Asian recession. This Budget will add to the confident air that is pervading Cairns at present.

With regard to the move to the Smart State, Russell Board said—

"It would be interesting to see to what extent the initiatives would impact on the Far North."

That is not an unreasonable comment, because the Government has invested \$20m this year on major new biotechnological research centres at the University of Queensland and at Griffith University as part of an ambitious \$270m 10-year plan to create thousands of New Age jobs. It is an interesting question and one that I want to address, because the foundation for the Smart State must be laid in our schools, and all schools—including schools in far-north Queensland—are going to be benefiting from that.

We know that computer technology is becoming increasingly integrated into every aspect of our daily lives, both at home and at work, and all students must and will be adequately prepared. Education Queensland's \$65m investment in information technology programs and equipment in this Budget will not only introduce our students to a borderless world of learning but also equip them with the essential skills that are required in the labour market of tomorrow. The Government's goal is a ratio of one computer for every five students—half the current ratio. The first milestone towards this strategy will be the achievement of a ratio of one to 7.5 by the year 2001.

The Government has developed a new network learning community initiative, which will provide \$40m over four years, beginning with \$5m this year, to enhance IT base learning through professional development for teachers and technical support for schools. This funding is in addition to the \$23.5m funding under the Schooling 2001 program for learning technology grants that each year are distributed directly to schools. I am particularly pleased to see a recognition of the need for additional support for technical maintenance and professional development in IT, because such issues have been raised with me when I have visited the schools in my electorate, which are really embracing IT and developing exciting, innovative programs.

Among those schools, of course, is the Smithfield State High School. The students have won awards for their work in this area. As I have talked about this issue already in this House, members might recall that last year the IT building at Smithfield State High School was burnt down. A new state-of-the-art building has just been completed. The other day I had a sneak preview of it. It certainly is an exciting building. Later on this year I will be going with the Minister for Education to open that building. In that regard, I certainly will be telling members of this House more about the exciting things that are happening at Smithfield State High School.

The Budget also recognised the role of vocational education and training in information technology, making Queensland the Smart State. TAFE has been allocated a record \$38.3m in capital expenditure for IT & T. TAFE in Cairns has been selected as one of four TAFE institutions to deliver new IT & T training programs. It will share in the \$2.6m allocated for that purpose.

Other evidence in far-north Queensland of the Government's commitment to making Queensland the Smart State is increased bandwidth services in the Brisbane to Cairns corridor to heighten competition with Telstra and reduce the current prohibitive cost of access to the Internet for the rapid transfer of data. That will be of enormous value to the Smithfield campus of the James Cook University for their research and teaching. Indeed, that access is essential for any serious research university and the initiative is very welcome.

Although the Government has committed its major effort to new biotechnology research at the University of Queensland and Griffith University, as I have indicated the Government has also recognised the potential of a technology precinct associated with the Cairns campus at JCU. Consultants will shortly begin work on a business plan that will be prepared to progress this concept. As the person who chairs the committee that is involved in that project, I can say that I have really been very encouraged by the support that I have been given both by the Parliamentary Secretary, Stephen Robertson, and the Minister, Jim Elder, in this regard.

As members would know, the Cooperative Research Centre for Tropical Rainforest Ecology and Management is located on the Smithfield campus. We are looking forward to that becoming a world centre of excellence for rainforest and related environmental research. Other research and technology areas that have been discussed for our region are health, agriculture and mining. All of those have the potential to generate commercial developments, jobs and revenue.

The next stage in the development of a technology precinct at Smithfield could be the establishment of an incubator. These high-impact facilities foster the commercialisation of new technologies by creating a supportive and instructive environment for entrepreneurs. I visited Adelaide and Perth to see for myself first-hand how incubators can lead to exciting commercial developments in exports. I have already signalled to the Minister for State Development, Jim Elder, that I am keen to progress our technology precinct plans in next year's Budget.

The Government is also supporting to the tune of \$250,000 the Cairns Regional Economic Development Corporation to enable it to continue to support our industry clusters, including our very strong IT cluster. In fact, I have just received an invitation to launch the new company that they have formed called Cairns Infotech Enterprises. One of their exciting projects is a CBD touch screen, which will be part of the revitalisation program for the Cairns CBD.

New information technologies can expand our cultural activities. Cairns has a small but growing group of people developing skills in multimedia. Arts Queensland will be supporting this development by funding a digital multimedia lab in Cairns for artists and multimedia developers. I am looking forward to working with local groups to progress that concept, because it obviously has some very exciting potential. It should be clear by now that Cairns is ready to play its part in making Queensland the Smart State. We will be making good use of all of the opportunities that are provided in this Budget.

In the time remaining, I would like to conclude by referring to specific allocations in the Budget that will be particularly welcomed by the Barron River electorate. Firstly, I would like to touch on educational matters. The Freshwater, Trinity Beach and Edge Hill schools will be taking advantage of the airconditioning subsidies that are available. Work worth \$743,000 will be carried out to make learning and teaching more effective and enjoyable this summer.

I will ensure that my schools will benefit from the \$50m Building Better Schools program. I will be supporting Smithfield State High School in its bid to get the school repainted. In fact, the exterior of the school has not been painted since it was built in 1983. At this point, I would like to take the opportunity to commend Larry Gallagher, the principal, and his staff for the excellent work that they are doing. Some public schools have a leakage of students to private schools. However, I am very pleased to say that the reverse is occurring at Smithfield State High School.

I will also be working with the new Kuranda State High School, which has identified in its facilities development plan that it would like to have a community hall that could be utilised by both the school and the community. We will be looking at ways in which we can apply for Government subsidies to progress that initiative. Although Redlynch school is not in my electorate—at least not until after the next election—I will be working with Desley Boyle to ensure that plans for a new administration block, an extension to its resource centre and preschool, are all progressed in next year's Budget.

Police resources in Barron River have been very well catered for. Last year we had a boost by having a Police Beat at Trinity Beach and four extra officers appointed to the Smithfield Police Station. I would like to put the Police Minister on notice that I will be discussing with him the next Police Beat, which I would like to see at Holloways Beach. I have also been discussing with him the need to provide an extra car and an Aboriginal police liaison officer at Kuranda, as well as police accommodation there.

Kuranda is in great need of further Aboriginal housing. Unfortunately, they missed out on funds last year, but they have a community housing project in relation to which I will be doing some lobbying, because I believe that they are pretty close to the top of the priority list. I hope that they are going to be successful this year. No doubt along with the Housing Minister, Robert Schwarten, I will enjoy opening 10 seniors units shortly in Smithfield—the first ever seniors units in that region. In fact, when I last tried to have seniors units constructed in my electorate, there was an enormous community backlash. As a result, the seniors suffered. However, I am glad to say that we are now getting those seniors units.

Transport is a key issue in my electorate. I have been very pleased with the progress that has been made. Just last week, I was with the Minister at the opening of the \$21m Redlynch deviation. Certainly, there are problems in my electorate, and it would be wrong of me not to recognise those problems. However, I am glad to say that, starting in the school holidays, some \$140,000 of work will be done to upgrade a problem intersection at Hartley Street and Kamerunga Road to make it safer for parents and students of the Peace Lutheran College.

Mr Johnson: A 50% cut in your road funding—do you endorse that?

Dr CLARK: I can tell the member that road funding for the Barron River electorate is spot-on. We are doing great things.

Mr Johnson interjected.

Dr CLARK: As the shadow Transport Minister knows, there will also be a need next year for a major project regarding the Kuranda Range road study, which will be reporting to the Government next August. Certainly we will be needing to think about putting funding in next year's Budget to help us progress those planning studies.

Work will be progressing on the Smithfield shopping centre transit hub, which I am really pleased about because it will be of benefit to everyone using public transport in my electorate. In terms of the environment, a State marine park is going to be gazetted later this year. Management money will be going into that marine park to improve the management of our coastal resources. Work totalling some \$1m will be done at the Barron River National Park for visitor infrastructure, which I have been working very hard to develop. There will be boardwalks and other infrastructure so that visitors can find their way to see the various exciting attributes of that park. The Smithfield Conservation Park will be gazetted later this year. We will be looking forward to developing a management plan for that.

The Wet Tropics Management Authority received funding of \$5.79m. It has been working very hard in developing projects that it is hoping will be funded through the Heritage Trails Network. That is going to be a very important project in many of the Wet Tropics areas in far-north Queensland if the infrastructure there is to be improved. To that end, the authority has been working very closely with all the local authorities.

Cassowaries has been a very important issue. I am glad to say that there is going to be an increase in funding to develop our recovery plan to employ a conservation officer. That officer will be dedicated to working with the community groups that are doing excellent work on the ground.

I have been working very closely with the local government to develop sports in my electorate. I am going to encourage the Cairns City Council to apply for funding through the grants that are available to provide a regional facility for skateboarding and rollerblading— something for the teenagers in my electorate. Often they are the ones who miss out. Our parks often have things for the little ones to play on, but we need BMX tracks, skateboarding facilities and lots of other things for teenagers as part of our prevention of crime strategy.

Everyone in the Barron River electorate will benefit from the redevelopment of the Cairns Base Hospital and the increase in HACC funding. Also I want to ensure that the community health centre at Smithfield continues to provide good service. I will be seeking to upgrade dental health services there in response to the growing demand.

One can see that there are lots of positive things happening in the far north and, particularly, in the Barron River electorate. I will continue to work very hard with my communities to ensure that they continue to benefit from the Budget that this Government has provided. I commend the Minister and the Premier for all their good work.
