



Speech by

**SHAUN NELSON**

**MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS**

Hansard 16 September 1999

### 1999 STATE BUDGET

**Mr NELSON** (Tablelands—IND) (1 a.m.): I would have liked to believe everything that the Premier said in his Budget Speech. Unfortunately, there have been some very worrying developments, in particular the comment by Standard and Poor's. I hope that someone from the Government side will address that issue. Is what they are saying true or not? I have heard a lot of speeches tonight, but I have not heard anyone actually say, "No, there isn't really a \$350m deficit."

**Mr Mackenroth:** No, there isn't a \$350m deficit.

**Mr NELSON:** I would like to see that proven. These people have made a lot of claims. All I am asking is that somebody demonstrate to me that that is not right.

**Mr Reeves:** They tell me you're trying to get on The Panel. Is that true?

**Mr NELSON:** It is true. I would love to go on The Panel. However, I do not think that that has anything to do with the Budget. Would the member not like to go on it? As I said during the last Budget debate, I do not know much about accounting. It is probably one of my weakest points. I am not about to blast anyone's Budget; I know that I personally could not do a better job. However, I would like to make a few points. I do not want to take anything away from anyone. I know that my electorate is completely surrounded by Labor electorates, which all did quite well out of the Budget. There are quite a lot of good things for those electorates in the Budget. Of course, what is good for Cairns is good for the region around it, so I do not want to be critical of that at all. However, a couple of matters are causing me concern.

The first matter that I want to raise is the issue of three-phase power for the dairy industry. The issue has been ongoing from the term of the previous Government. My predecessor promised the dairy industry—and I have press releases to back this up—that he would give them \$1m to get three-phase power to certain areas in the dairy industry. As any member who has worked in the dairy industry would know, it is hard to keep milk cold before the trucks come to collect it. It is even harder to do that when one has to do it by using a generator or when there is an unsteady power supply. I am not talking about a massive amount of money; \$1m was promised to them. It did not come in the last Budget and it has not come in this Budget. I raise the issue in vain, but at least I have raised it.

I am sure the Minister would remember that at the Atherton Community Cabinet meeting, Premier Beattie quite barefacedly tried to draw some heat off the issue. Of course, at the time I was quite vocal about it. The Premier said that he would give—please correct me if I am wrong—in the vicinity of \$700,000 and \$150,000 in capital works. I would really like someone to point that allocation out to me in the Budget. I cannot find it. I have looked. I found \$50,000, but I certainly have not found anywhere in the vicinity of \$700,000. I would also like members to think about the figures that I am talking about. So far, everyone else in this Chamber has talked about billions of dollars; I am talking about \$700,000. That was a promise that was made before a large crowd. There were a lot of people at that Community Cabinet meeting. These Community Cabinet meetings are a very good initiative of the Beattie Government. They are very popular. Certainly they were well supported on the tablelands. In relation to that \$700,000—and again I stand corrected if it was a little bit more or a little bit less—I remember the Premier promising that amount right at the very start of that meeting. I cannot find that allocation in the Budget. I hope that somebody can point out to me where it is in the Budget.

I do not know whether anyone remembers the previous Budget debate, but during that debate the member for Ipswich took great pleasure—and I think I was the only member mentioned by name in

his speech but, again, I cannot be sure—in referring to my comments about the Malanda State High School. He said, "The manual arts block will be built this year." Those are the words that he used. Of course, that was in 1998. I let 1998 go by. I gave him the benefit of the doubt; I thought that he might have meant the financial year. Another Budget has been delivered, and not one single stone has been moved. I have heard absolutely nothing whatsoever about it, except from people at the high school itself saying that they have no knowledge of it being commenced. Again, I am sure that if members look at Hansard they will see that the member for Ipswich, who at the time was the Treasurer, stood up and said that that would be done. It has not been done. That is not letting me down; that is letting down the people of Malanda. I guarantee that those people know that.

Many roads on the tablelands are in need of work. I do not want members to think that I am singling out only two roads, but one is McHugh Road. It is a rather dangerous section of road and is frequented regularly by dairy trucks, cattle trucks and sometimes—even though it is not supposed to happen—B-doubles. As I say, it is a very dangerous section of road. I was told quite emphatically that work would start on it in June so that it would be done before the wet season. Work has not commenced on that road at all. Transport Department staff brought me the plans and so on and said that the work was going to be done. I repeat: not a single bit of work has commenced.

I have raised with the Department of Transport the issue of a realignment that was to be carried out at Marks Lane and the Gillies Highway. One farmer in particular was told, "It is going to happen in May. Be ready, it will be happening in May. The resumption of your land will be in May. The roadworks will be commenced in May." He actually altered his crop rotation, did not plant as much as he should have planted, and the work did not commence. It is now September and that work still has not commenced. People have been told that it would be carried out and it has not even begun. Obviously the money has been allocated for those works to be carried out, or the Department of Transport would not say that it has. I would be very interested if somebody could tell me where that money has gone.

While I am speaking about major projects, I have heard a lot of members on this side talk about the major projects that are going on in their electorates. Again, I looked through the Budget—I do not have anyone down here working for me, I work by myself—and I cannot find any major projects—

**Mr Reeves:** Join the club.

**Mr NELSON:** The member has a party to back him up. I am an Independent. I cannot find any major projects in the Budget for the tablelands. I cannot find an allocation of any massive amount of money. As I said, I cannot even find \$700,000 for the Atherton Hospital. As I have said before in this Chamber, that hospital does not even have flyscreens. It services a very large population and certainly has a high workload.

One very worrying fact about the Budget that has been brought to my attention by somebody who knows a hell of a lot more about budgets than me is in relation to this 6% equity return. That person is very worried about such things as one-man police stations and the fact that the capital expenditure for one-man police stations might become an issue. The actual asset outlay for those stations might become an issue in the future and we might see a rationalisation of one-man police stations. I do not believe that the Beattie Government intends to do that. However, I would like to put on the record here and now that I do not want to ever see that happen. One-man police stations are very important, especially in my electorate where there are quite a few.

To end on a high note, I express my appreciation for certain provisions in the Budget. Of course, there is the money that has been allocated to much-needed improvements at Lotus Glen. It is a very large facility. It certainly houses a lot of people from north Queensland who probably have not been very good.

It is good that money is being allocated to the sugar industry, which at the moment is experiencing a number of problems. The Sugar Industry Bill is before the House. To the best of my knowledge, sugar is a very new industry on the tablelands. To the best of my knowledge and from the representations that I have had from people involved in the sugar industry on the tablelands, the very big issue of transferability needs to be addressed. Again, that is an issue that will be dealt with when the Sugar Industry Bill is debated.

In all, I cannot say whether this is a good Budget or a bad Budget. I do not have that sort of expertise. I ask that the issues that I have raised be addressed. I am talking about expenditure in the vicinity of \$5m or maybe \$6m. If those issues could be addressed, that would be very greatly appreciated not only by me but also by the 27,000-odd people who live on the tablelands. It would certainly keep me quiet for the next year. I do not believe that that small amount of money is too much to ask. Time and time again, these issues have been addressed in this House not only by me but also by the previous member.

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