



Speech by

Mr TIM MULHERIN

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

Hansard 17 September 1999

1999 STATE BUDGET

Mr MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (2.46 p.m.): It is a pleasure to speak in support of the Budget. The record \$16.8 billion Budget has been prepared on a full accrual accounting basis and represents a new approach to public sector financial management. The Budget will ensure that Queensland enters the next century and the new millennium appropriately skilled, economically strong and socially responsible.

This is a Budget for all Queenslanders. It is a Budget based on a growth rate of 3.75%, with unemployment dropping from 9%—a rate which Labor inherited from the previous coalition Government—to 7.75%. This is a Budget that positions Queensland to lead Australia as the Smart State and the intellectual hub of the Asia-Pacific region. The Smart State will see Queensland's economy expand and job opportunities created through the development of an industry culture based on innovation and the commercial adoption of research and knowledge through cooperative research centres and technology incubators, which will drive exports. Some of the Smart State funding highlights include \$20m for major new biotechnological research centres. There is also record education expenditure of \$4.2 billion, which includes \$40m over four years to the network learning community initiative of Education Queensland. This program is designed to enhance learning outcomes through information technology and will enable students to take confident steps into the knowledge age. It will enable a sufficient number of computers to be put into Queensland schools to eventually achieve a ratio of one computer to every five students.

An additional \$114m will be spent on literacy and numeracy. An amount of \$55m will be allocated to enhance IT-based learning in Queensland schools, \$204m will be allocated to equip Queensland's work force in IT & T skills through TAFE, and \$3m will be allocated as part of the Government's \$10m investment in supercomputing technology. There will be an allocation of \$3.26m towards the Queensland Government's \$13.9m investment in Queensland Cooperative Research Centres, including \$2m to expand the Centre for Dry Tropics Agriculture in Bowen and \$8m towards a \$17m electronic service delivery strategy, which will allow the Government to provide more integrated and responsive services to the community.

An integral part of creating jobs is the record \$5.2 billion capital works spending on health, education, public housing, law and order, transport and roads, which will create 41,000 jobs and stimulate economic activity in all regions throughout Queensland. The Budget also provides for the employment of 350 Q-Build apprentices, 253 additional police, 288 new teachers and 73 extra emergency service personnel as well as another \$80m for the Beattie Government's successful Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative.

For too long, conservative Queensland Governments have behaved as if they oversaw an economy, not a society. Labor is restoring the balance. Whilst maintaining its excellent economic credentials, the Beattie Labor Government is delivering record budgets in Health, Education and Families, including the commitment to increase child protection spending by 50% over four years in response to the Forde inquiry. As the Premier said—

"The Forde inquiry revealed a broken system starved of resources. It will take time and careful planning to build up its strength."

I welcome the Premier's commitment that he will revisit the Forde inquiry funding recommendation year after year to lift spending toward the national average.

I turn my attention to my electorate of Mackay and its regions. This financial year the Mackay, Whitsunday and hinterland regions will receive \$197.6m in capital spending. The Opposition has been doing its normal thing and knocking and spreading half-truths about the Budget in Mackay. It has said that capital spending is down by \$48m on last year. Whilst this is true, it has not told the people of Mackay the facts. The facts are as follows. Capital works spending can vary up or down from year to year due to the commencement or conclusion of work, and often investment by the Government sector in capital works will see major investment by the private sector. This is the case in Mackay, but the coalition does not want to tell the community of Mackay the whole story.

The first fact is that the \$48m reduction in capital works is a result of the completion of the following works: \$1m for the completion of Proserpine Hospital; \$3.3m for multipurpose health service facilities at Clermont; \$11.8m for Stages 1 and 2 of the Mackay Hospital redevelopment; \$13.4m from national highway funding for works on the Ron Camm Bridge and road approaches; \$6.2m for the new schools at Marian and Beaconsfield; and \$16m on the construction of the rock wall for the Mackay marina. That adds up to over \$51m. There are many other projects that have also been completed which I could rattle off.

The second fact—and the coalition hates this one and it hates being reminded of it, because it was always opposed to it—concerns the construction of the rock wall for the Mackay marina, which has led to a massive investment by the private sector that will see a world-class 500-berth marina, residential, hotel and retail complex developed at the Mackay harbour. The Point Binli Group will invest some \$150m in this project, which will create as many as 100 jobs in construction and many more jobs for the service sector on completion—jobs for Mackay people. That puts to rest claims by the Opposition that there would be job losses as a result of the reduction in capital works spending. This is a good example of how a \$16m investment by the Government and the port authority has led to massive investment by the private sector.

I wish to refresh the memory of the members opposite. In 1995 the Goss Government announced in its Budget a funding allocation of \$8m for the construction of the Mackay marina wall, with a further contribution of \$5m from the port authority. At the time, the Labor Government agreed that, if there was any escalation in the cost, it would contribute additional funds in conjunction with the port authority to offset the cost to the port authority. We have delivered on our 1995 promise in this Budget by allocating an additional \$2m to the port authority.

The coalition Government came to power in 1996 and its first Budget dealt a severe blow to the people of Mackay and the marina development. It scrapped the \$8m for the project that Labor had committed in 1995 to help fund the decision made by the member for Caloundra to scrap the toll on the Sunshine Motorway. I fought hard to have this money reinstated in the Budget and in 1997, because of the pressure from the community and me, the coalition allocated funds in the Budget, but would not allow the funds to be drawn on until 1998. In 1998 we had a State election and it took the Beattie Labor Government to make this funding a reality. Major developments at the Mackay harbour—

Mr Schwarten: Wasn't one of your relations involved in that?

Mr MULHERIN: My great uncle was heavily involved in the early development of the harbour. As I said, major developments at the Mackay harbour have been due to Labor Government initiatives, from the construction of the man-made harbour by the Forgan Smith Labor Government over 60 years ago to the bulk sugar terminals that were built and opened by the Gair Labor Government in 1957 prior to the split, and now the marina development and the \$26m upgrade of the sugar wharf under the Goss and Beattie Labor Governments.

I place on record my thanks to a truly visionary Mackay man, Mr Ron Searle, the Chairman of the Mackay Port Authority, who defied all his critics by making the marina and the redevelopment of the port a reality. I thank also my colleagues the member for Ipswich, the Honourable David Hamill, who gave the initial approval back in 1995 and who has been very supportive of the port authority and these projects, and the member for Cook, the Honourable Steve Bredhauer, who has been very supportive of the port authority since becoming the Transport Minister.

Nearly \$80m will be spent in the region on transport infrastructure. I welcome also the \$16.6m allocation to complete Stages 3 and 4 of the hospital redevelopment, and I commend the Minister for Health for her efforts to improve health services in the Mackay district and in particular for her efforts to provide more specialist services. I welcome also the Budget allocation for the medical school at Townsville. The medical school, which will be attached to the James Cook University, will bring enormous benefit to all of the major centres in north Queensland, from Cairns in the north, Mackay in the south and Mount Isa in the west. We will have doctors that will be educated, trained and working in the north. This will address the problems we have in attracting doctors and specialists to north Queensland.

The redevelopment at Mackay will include a new women's section, a child and adolescent unit, a new medical records unit, a new allied health building, a new front entry, an emergency department

and a new ambulance entry, a new day-procedures unit, refurbished medical imaging, a refurbished intensive care unit, a new, fourth operating theatre and a dedicated aged care rehabilitation unit. All of that work should be completed by Christmas 2000. I place on record my appreciation to Mackay District Hospital staff—doctors, nurses, wardsmen, maintenance and hotel services staff—for their patience with the redevelopment and their dedication to improving services for patients. Over \$18.6m will be spent on capital works in the Health area throughout the Mackay district.

Another exciting new program which the Government has announced in this Budget which will benefit Mackay is the Regional Centres program, which is all about working in partnership with local government to improve and revitalise our city infrastructure. I look forward to working with the Mayor, Councillor Julie Boyd, and the Mackay City Council in looking at ways in which we can improve our city and then developing a submission for funding under this program. I congratulate also the Minister for Local Government and Regional and Rural Communities, the Honourable Terry Mackenroth, on this excellent program.

The Government will be spending \$7.5m on capital works in the area of local government. This financial year, nearly \$9m will be provided to build more public housing in the Mackay district. Recently, the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing, the Honourable Robert Schwarten, visited Mackay and saw at first-hand the types of innovative housing projects that his department has carried out in the Mackay district. It is great to see a Minister who is passionate about public housing. Another one of his passions is apprenticeships, and I congratulate the Minister for what he has done to give our young men and women of this State an opportunity to undertake apprenticeships with his department.

While on the subject of apprenticeships, I welcome the pledge of another \$80m for the successful Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative. That initiative has already brought real benefits for the long-term unemployed, young job seekers and disadvantaged members of the Mackay community, with substantial injections of funds for jobs and training. It has also brought real benefits to the general community, including local businesses, which have received cash incentives of up to \$2,000 for each additional apprentice and trainee hired. In the Mackay region, private sector employers have taken on an additional 232 apprentices and trainees. In addition, 55 unemployed people have received jobs and training under the Community Jobs Plan on major community projects. Another 124 local disadvantaged unemployed people have secured training or skilling to boost their chances at pursuing a career. I place on record my appreciation to the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations for his commitment to the long-term unemployed.

I welcome also the \$21.7m that will be spent on Education capital works, including an allocation for additional facilities at the Eimeo Road State School. I congratulate the Minister for providing additional funds under the Cooler Schools program, which many schools throughout the region will benefit from, and also for implementing in this Budget the Building Better Secondary Schools program. I know that school communities are 100% behind him on this program.

Recently we announced the master planning and upgrading of Mackay's oldest secondary school, Mackay State High School. The principal, Mr Ed Bray, and the school community welcomed this announcement and are looking forward to the implementation of the master plan which will improve the facilities at Mackay State High School. In the area of Main Roads, the Government will be spending \$16.5m on roads in the region, including the Clairview to Flaggy Rock section of the Bruce Highway and the Proserpine-Shute Harbour Road. The people of Airlie Beach will also benefit by the Government funding allocation of \$8m towards the Airlie Beach lagoon project which will certainly revitalise the beach precinct at Airlie Beach and will be a major boost to tourism in the Whitsundays.

I would also like to thank the Minister for Police and Corrective Services for allocating funding for the establishment of a police shopfront at Canelands Shopping Centre. This is on top of his previous commitment to provide a Police Beat at Slade Point, which is now in operation. These initiatives, along with additional police, provide a safer environment for our community.

\$29.6m will be spent on capital works in the electricity industry, improving reliability of supply and meeting the needs of development in the region. All in all, Mackay has fared reasonably well and there are a number of potential projects, such as the Mackay multipurpose facilities that will, if feasible, continue to ensure that Mackay maintains its fair share of the State capital works spending.

This Budget is a responsible Budget. It is a Budget for all Queenslanders. It is a Budget that will ensure Queensland enters the next century and the new millennium appropriately skilled, economically strong and socially responsible. This Budget will ensure that we keep our competitive tax environment. It will ensure that the level of service provision is sustained by maintaining an overall general Government operating surplus and that borrowings on other financial arrangements will be undertaken only for capital investment and can be serviced within the operating surplus and, thus, maintaining a AAA credit rating.

I would like to congratulate the Premier and the member for Ipswich for their hard work in putting the Budget together. Their efforts have been well received across the State. I commend both appropriation Bills to the House.
