



Speech by

Mrs D. PRATT

MEMBER FOR BARAMBAH

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BUDGET 2000

Mrs PRATT (Barambah—IND) (12.39 a.m.): After the previous two Budgets, I have to state from the outset that I was not disappointed in this third Beattie Budget, because I did not expect too much. But I was very surprised to see a media release issued from the Office of the Treasurer headed "Barambah a big winner in the state budget 2000". What was the Treasurer's idea of a big win for Barambah? According to the Treasurer's press release, this Budget has delivered to my electorate further funding for the completion of a 400-bed extension to a prison—a prison which the Barambah electorate does not have. The Premier will remember that Yarraman wanted the prison and fought hard for it, but it was delivered to Maryborough instead—a former Labor seat—and a 400-bed extension was given to Woodford, in the electorate of the member for Nicklin. The expansion of the prison is not new news and the funds allocated are a carryover from almost two years ago. Given his error with respect to its location, I hope the Treasurer will forgive me for questioning other aspects of this Budget.

The Beattie Queensland Government has tried to hoodwink the Barambah electorate into thinking it has delivered for local residents, but the hyped up media release is very misleading. The effort to make this Government look good has extended to claiming the funding for the Tarong North extension as another major win for Barambah. It is a win, yes, but again it is last year's announcement carried into the new Budget. Do not get me wrong, we are more than grateful for the Tarong North expansion and the jobs that come with it.

The \$700,000 for schools in the electorate and the \$250,000 towards a half-million-dollar refurbishment of the home economics block at the Murgon State High School will be greatly appreciated by all. They have needed it for a long time and the students will love it. Many schools in the Barambah electorate have been crying out for assistance for a long time and it is good to see a few more of the schools receiving some assistance.

The \$930,000 funding for the Burnett Highway is also appreciated, as roads in our area are a major issue. But I seek some clarification from the Minister: is this purely funding allocated already under the current Roads Infrastructure Program or is it extra funding? If it is money from the current RIP, I would be interested in knowing whether the funding for this current RIP has been reduced, because the figure of \$930,000 mentioned in the Budget is a lot less than is currently indicated in the RIP. On the other hand, if it is in fact extra funding, for exactly which section of the road is it allocated?

For the record, I wish to mention a further road in dire need of funding, and that is the road up the Blackbutt Range. Attention is urgently needed, as its condition is deteriorating rapidly. With the Tarong North expansion, the trucks utilising the range road will only compound the deterioration. It is a road that ideally requires a passing lane.

The Beattie Government has suffered badly over the past two years with so many protest marches against the Government that to ensure re-election Mr Beattie has to pull something out of the hat. Cheshire smiles will not get him over the line, and this Budget is designed with the election in mind. Mr Beattie is targeting Labor Party seats or seats he believes are marginal in an endeavour to shore up Labor support.

This morning, Mr Beattie and many other Ministers made a great show of protecting the right of small towns to exist in spite of the much publicised view of Warren Entsch, who suggested that small towns with a population under 4,000 should be encouraged to die. In the entire electorate of Barambah

that would mean that only one town would survive, and that is Kingaroy. Imagine almost 15,000 square kilometres—the size of the electorate—starting only an hour's drive from Brisbane, devoid of all but one town. It is quite a frightening thought.

Mr Speaker, you can imagine the feeling in the towns and shires towards the Beattie Government's third Budget, which does very little for the majority of those small towns that Mr Beattie stated so strongly this morning should be encouraged to survive. This morning I stated that in the first week of deregulation 17 advertisements and notices appeared in the local newspapers announcing the dispersal of dairy herds. Several people have also stated—and these people had small dairy farms but made a reasonable living—that they have now been relegated to the unemployment queues. Bureaucrats who do not know anything make plans on paper which look feasible but which in reality turn out to be a disaster. The people in rural communities are the sacrificial guinea pigs.

These dairy farmers have survived for generations and supported other families. At the stroke of a pen, their lifestyle has been scrapped. Not only are their livelihoods and heritage stripped from them; the compensation offered is an insult. They will survive. People on the land often travel to hell and back in an effort to produce, and they will bounce back again. Although they have fought the traditional adversaries of every farmer for years, they should not have had to fight against a theory that subsequently virtually destroyed their industry.

This continuing shutdown of rural and other industries does not encourage the survival of small towns. National Competition Policy and deregulation do not encourage small towns to survive, and these policies are actively supported by this Government. This Budget does very little to enhance the chances of small towns' survival.

Everyone is aware that there is a constant migration from rural areas to the cities, and this migration has caused the steady decline in the population in those areas. Instead of encouraging our population to spread out across the land establishing industries and creating jobs and wealth, Governments encourage industry and businesses to crowd together in the cities, and slowly but surely this land of opportunity is being drained of people. The people with the will to achieve the potential this country is capable of in the long term are lost due to a short-term lack of vision. That a meatworks exists in the middle of the city at Dinmore is incomprehensible when we have so much country out there where a meatworks would not only be practical but also welcome. Instead our rural meatworks are under enormous pressure and constant threat of closure. With the technology available today, why are businesses and industries not encouraged to move a little further west? Where is the vision that our forefathers had for this State and where are the long-term visionaries and their projects for the future?

Mr Wells: On this side of the House.

Mrs PRATT: That is a joke.

A State which has such great potential is stagnating. The Premier has often stated that Queensland is a State on the move. Unfortunately, it is the State's industry workers, rural workers, landholders, teachers, nurses and, most damning of all, unionists who are on the move—the strength of the Labor Party. Even they are marching against this Government's performance. They realise that all of the rhetoric from this Government about how many jobs it has created means very little when we add up the number of jobs that have been lost.

This Budget has met with a mixed reaction from local governments in the Barambah electorate, with most generally supporting the response of the Local Government Association of Queensland. There are two major disappointments for local government. One is that no moneys have been allocated to subsidise waste management rehabilitation. The other major issue of concern for the LGAQ is the reduction by \$3.5m in strategic weed management control and the fact that there are no moneys for rural land protection. Considering that the Minister has gone to great lengths to close or protect such large tracts of rural Queensland, it is surprising that he has not ensured that further funding was available to address these essential program requirements.

This is a very disappointing Budget in many aspects. There is no question that budgeting is often a very difficult task, as there is an enormous number of requests for inclusion in the Budget allocations. This Budget has a definite bias and weighs heavily in favour of Labor electorates. This Budget lacks an across-the-board fairness which is essential from a good Government. Mr Beattie has stated on many occasions that his Government is a Government for all Queenslanders, but after reading the Budget I think he should revise that statement. The Budget is a product of this Labor Government, and this Government is only as good as the man who leads it. The Budget and the man have both been found wanting.
