



Speech by

Mr TIM MULHERIN

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

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BUDGET 2000

Mr MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (11.59 a.m.): It is a pleasure to speak in support of the Budget. Firstly, I would like to congratulate the Treasurer, the Honourable David Hamill, for delivering an economic blueprint which will build on the foundations that have previously been laid in the last two Beattie Labor Government Budgets. The Budget is based on a growth rate of 3.75%, creating 31,000 new jobs, bringing total new employment since June 1998 to 110,000. General Government operating revenue is expected to grow by 4.4% to \$18.18 billion. General Government operating expenses are expected to increase by 4.5% to \$18.15 billion, delivering on a range of services and infrastructure across the State. The Budget will deliver a new operating surplus of \$29m and a cash surplus of \$330m in the general Government sector with no new taxes or increases in taxes.

Yesterday we heard the normal whinge from the Opposition Leader about how the Budget failed to deliver services, alleging an accumulated Budget deficit of \$1.6 billion. He cannot have it both ways. He cannot argue for a Budget surplus and then argue about the lack of services that were not included in this Budget. The Beattie Labor Government has been increasing services and infrastructure whilst living within our means. Let us look at the record of the Opposition Leader when he was Premier, under his two years at the helm. His record was an increase in spending by 21% whilst revenue increased by only 8%, with seven new taxes or increases in taxes and charges.

We all remember the debacle of the then coalition Treasurer, the honourable Joan Sheldon, when she promised no new taxes or increases in charges. In her first Budget she introduced a tyre tax and entry fee charges into national parks and raided the electricity industry of \$850m. We all know that, if this reckless spending was able to continue under the leadership of the member for Surfers Paradise, Queensland would have faced massive increases in taxes and charges, thus losing its competitive edge over other States or he would have had to sell off the power industry assets to pay for his spending—and that was the more likely scenario.

This Labor Budget, unlike the coalition Budgets, has delivered increased services and a Budget surplus whilst living within our means, contrary to the views of the Opposition Leader. If the Opposition Leader finds this fact difficult to swallow, he should read what independent commentators have had to say. I am sure that his allegations of a \$1.6 billion accumulated deficit would not be a view shared by the financial commentators. What do the independent commentators say about this Budget? Terry McCrann, who is no friend of Labor, said—

"In particular, the puzzle of how the budget could predict a \$330m cash surplus ... yet also require borrowing of \$731m. A classic fiddle? No, just the consequences of highly desirable fiscal prudence."

Mr Rick Shepherd, Director, Public Finance Ratings of Standard and Poor's said—

"The budgetary position of the Australian State of Queensland is very strong, supporting the State's AAA local currency credit rating. If you look at their ongoing finance operating surpluses and their cash surpluses, it all looks very good."

He went on to say—

"At the general Government level, their balance sheet is just so strong, it's quite unbelievable".

I do hope that the Opposition Leader takes the time to read what the independent commentators are saying. It might wipe the whingeing look off his face.

The cornerstone of this record Budget is the investment by this Government in the State's greatest asset—its people. This Budget is a Budget for all Queenslanders. It is a Budget firmly focused on families and young people. It will ensure that Queensland is appropriately skilled, economically strong and socially responsible so that it can lead Australia as the Smart State and the intellectual hub of the Asia-Pacific region. The Smart State will see the State'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 a record \$3.359 billion Education budget, including \$9m to continue the Networked Learning Communities Program supporting information technology in State schools; ensuring that there is one computer for every five children in secondary schools by 2001-02 and for Years 3 to 7 by 2003-04; and increasing the retention rate of students completing Year 12. The Budget also allocates \$675m to vocational education and training. The Government will also spend \$3.3m to enhance the uptake of e-commerce by Queensland businesses.

In bioindustries as part of a \$270m four-year plan, the Government will spend a further \$10.3m over four years for communication and information industry development, \$2.5m over five years for research and educational programs in collaboration with the Smithsonian Institution and an additional \$106m to establish a Queensland biotechnology innovation fund and to enhance the Public Communications Program.

The Budget will deliver on a range of services across the State in key areas such as health, education, law and order, emergency services, disabilities and families, and the environment. In the area of health, it is another record Budget of \$3.81 billion, including an extra \$9.3m for acute and community mental health services; more than \$2.5m for enhanced cancer treatment services; \$12.7m more for Home and Community Care Service; nearly \$1.7m for renal services in North Queensland; increases totalling \$1.4m for the Medical Aids Subsidy Scheme, the spectacle supply scheme and the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme; and more than \$2.5m extra to address nursing recruitment and retention issues.

In relation to disability services, with the assistance of the Commonwealth Government, Queenslanders with a disability will benefit from an additional \$18.1m in recurrent funding in 2000-01, rising to \$36.3m in recurrent funding in 2001 to 2004. This is in addition to the \$30m per annum election promise which was delivered by this Government. In just two short years, we have begun the task of rebuilding disability services after decades of neglect.

The best investment a Government can make is an investment in our children, which will give them the best possible start in life. This Budget is addressing our social responsibilities to our children, with \$69m allocated as part of the \$304m Putting Families First policy which complements our Smart State—Jobs for the Future initiative. This initiative will improve opportunities for children and give them a head start in life, support families as the primary nurturing environment and ensure that families live in safe and supportive communities.

The Government, through this Budget, will create 61,034 full-time jobs, with its record \$5.285 billion Capital Works Program in key areas such as health, education, public housing, law and order, transport, roads and ports, electricity, and rail. I am pleased that 64% of this record amount will be spent in regional areas outside of the south-east corner, which will stimulate economic activity across this decentralised State. I know that the Premier and Treasurer have copped some harsh criticism from the Property Council for this initiative, but I know that this has been welcomed by regional and rural Queensland. The Budget also provides for an additional 1,000 health workers, 357 police officers and, over the next four years, 800 more teachers as well as another \$80m to extend the successful Breaking the Unemployment Cycle.

As I said earlier, 64% of the record capital works budget has been allocated to regional and rural Queensland, and Mackay will receive its fair share. This financial year the Mackay, Whitsunday and hinterland regions will receive \$191.5m in capital works spending. This is most welcomed because Mackay, which has normally been insulated to some extent from economic downturns, has had a tough time lately due to low commodity prices in sugar and mining, thus affecting the retail and engineering services sectors. Whilst sugar prices are predicted to rise, this year's crop has been badly affected by orange rust and a rat plague. It is anticipated that the amount of cane crushed will be down 25% on last year's throughput, meaning less money for farmers and the community. I know that the Minister for Primary Industries has been looking at ways to assist the sugar industry through these tough times.

One of the initiatives which will no doubt be welcomed by the sugar industry is the initial grant of \$1.14m to the Sugar Research Institute and its collaborating partners to assist the industry in developing a renewable energy strategy. The program, which will run over four years, is proposing to

demonstrate major advances in bagasse-fired boiler design and operation, sugar mill energy efficiency and the identification of world's best practice for ethanol and bio-methane production. If successful, the program could lead to commercial investment by the sugar industry in renewable energy production on a large scale using leading edge technologies and providing income diversification. This technology for the industry could also be exported to other countries providing sustainable jobs in the area of fabrication and engineering workshops, especially in towns that rely on the sugar industry.

I want to outline some of the key initiatives that will flow from the capital works budget that will have lasting benefits to Mackay and its region. The heritage listed Mackay Court House, which was built in the 1930s when William Forgan Smith was the former Premier and member for Mackay, will receive a significant upgrade and extension to the current court building. This year, \$1.8m will be spent as part of the \$11.4m court modernisation program. Following an inspection of the building last year, I contacted the Attorney-General, the Honourable Matt Foley, and expressed my concerns about inadequate facilities for court users regarding safety and the general condition of the building due to white ant infestation.

I am pleased that the Attorney-General acted on my concerns. The refurbishment will certainly be welcomed by court staff, court users and local builders and suppliers. The Attorney-General has also agreed to my request that a user group including disability representatives be established to add input into the design. Another group who will be happy with this announcement will be local artists who will contribute with public art. I thank the Attorney-General for his support of this project.

Mackay has one of the highest per head per population involvement in the arts in this State. Due to this fact, the former Queensland Conservatorium of Music established its first campus outside Brisbane in Mackay. The "Mackay con", as it is affectionately known, has not had a permanent home since its establishment. As part of our election commitment, the Government has allocated \$600,000 this financial year as part of this \$3m project. The new building will be located at the Mackay campus of the Central Queensland University at Planlands. This new facility will be most welcomed by students and staff at the con. This building will further enhance its national reputation for excellence in music. I thank the Minister for Education and the Minister for the Arts for their continuing support for higher education in Mackay.

Whilst on the subject of education, Mackay and district secondary and primary schools are big winners in the Budget with nearly \$11m being expended on upgrades and new buildings such as those at the Eimeo Road State Primary School. Construction on that project commenced last financial year and will continue into this financial year. This amount also includes the ongoing airconditioning of schools under the Cooler Schools program. Contrary to media reports attributed to the member for Mirani, the Mackay State High School will receive a significant upgrade of its facilities under Round 2 of the Smart State Secondary School Refurbishment program. The school is currently developing a partnership agreement with the school community and Education Queensland. The school principal, Mr Ed Bray, his staff and the community are developing a new identity focusing on academic excellence, technology, music and agricultural education which will develop new pathways for senior secondary students to further training in the work force.

I am also pleased that provision has been made to purchase land for a new secondary school near the Eimeo Road State School in the northern beaches suburbs of Mackay. Only last week the Labor candidate for Whitsunday, Jan Jarratt, who will no doubt be the member for Whitsunday after the next election, and I announced the start of community consultation for the new secondary school. This wide-ranging consultation will determine the community's preferred pattern of schooling at the site. It is expected that the committee will deliver its recommendations by the end of the year. This new school will be most welcomed by the residents of the northern beaches suburbs, which are located in the fastest-growing corridor of Mackay. With growth averaging 9%, the population in these suburbs is expected to grow to 30,000 residents within 15 to 20 years. The Government has recognised the need for vital infrastructure in this corridor and has provided funding for land purchases this financial year for an ambulance station and a \$2m 24-hour police station, which will also have holding cells and a breath analysis/fingerprint/charge area, as well as funding for the Airlie Beach water police.

I congratulate the Police Minister on his support in improving police services and facilities in Mackay. Under the Goss and Beattie Labor Governments, the people of Mackay have received increased police numbers and facilities such as the regional headquarters, the refurbishment of the old Mackay Police Station and the Slade Point Police Beat and shopfront at Canelands Shopping Centre. A lot of money will be allocated for transport infrastructure, including \$15.7m as part of the \$35.7m Dalrymple Bay coal terminal Stage 5 redevelopment. That project will increase the capacity of that terminal from 40.7 million tonnes to 44.4 million tonnes per annum. A further \$8.3m is allocated for further infrastructure development at the seaport and airport installations. Railway infrastructure will also be upgraded to the tune of \$74m. Nearly \$24m will be spent on road infrastructure, including further works to the Peak Downs Highway at the Denison Creek/Airlie Beach loop road. I thank the Minister for

Transport and Minister for Main Roads for his ongoing efforts to improve vital infrastructure in the Mackay region.

The redevelopment of the Mackay Base Hospital is entering its final stage. A further \$4.5m has been allocated for the completion of the \$28.5m redevelopment, which includes 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, a new ambulance entry, a new day procedures unit, a refurbished intensive care unit, a new fourth operating theatre and a dedicated aged care rehabilitation unit. I place on record my appreciation to the staff at the Mackay District Hospital for their dedication to improving services.

Finally, this Budget is a responsible Budget. It is a Budget for all Queenslanders and a Budget which puts families and young people first. It will ensure that Queensland is appropriately skilled, economically strong and socially responsible. The Budget will ensure that we keep our competitive tax advantage by providing a Budget surplus and maintaining the State's AAA credit rating. I thank the Premier and Treasurer for their hard work and commitment to regional Queensland. I am sure that the people of this State appreciate their efforts. I commend both Bills to the House.
