



Speech by

**WARREN PITT**

**MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE**

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Hansard 20 July 2000

### **BUDGET 2000**

**Mr PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (2.30 p.m.): I rise today to speak to the Appropriation Bills 2000, and in doing so I am pleased to acknowledge the Budget brought down in the House this week, in that it is good for the State and an excellent result for the far north of Queensland. The Budget, which delivers a net operating surplus of \$29m and a cash surplus of \$330m as part of a record expenditure of \$18.15 billion, is welcome news indeed. This outstanding result in difficult economic times is set against a backdrop of no new taxes or fees and no increases in existing taxes and fees.

The centrepiece of the Budget 2000 is a record \$5.285 billion Capital Works Program. Of this record investment in our State's economic development, a massive 64% will be spent outside the south-east corner. Predictably, this shift in allocation has brought some howls of protest from certain quarters. Careful consideration of this measure reveals it to be a responsible delivery to regional and rural Queensland. As the most decentralised State in this country, Queensland boasts an economy still driven in the main by primary industry, whether it be agricultural, pastoral or in the mining sector. In addition, regional population centres provide the administrative muscle as well as significant levels of secondary and tertiary industry to drive our economy. It is therefore appropriate that investment in capital works infrastructure reflect this position.

Far-north Queensland, as a major regional hub, receives \$438m—about \$200m more than last year—in capital works spending. As well, a further \$110m has been allocated to economic and social infrastructure projects. Because Cairns is a regional focus, capital works expenditure in that city has a flow-on benefit to the far north in general. Important projects such as the construction of new Government offices in Sheridan Street, the Northern Fisheries Centre at Portsmith, the CityPort project and the continued redevelopment of the Cairns Base Hospital are critical to the controlled growth of the region as a whole.

The electorate of Mulgrave has been a significant winner in the 2000 Budget. I am delighted to see a further \$12.8m set aside for the second stage of the expansion of Bentley Park College. This is another important phase in a project with a total value of nearly \$30m. The Bentley Park College will eventually cater for 2,000 students on a campus in a P-12 setting which is on the leading edge of technological and educational innovation.

The Hambleton State School receives funding to address problems at the preschool second unit and to upgrade facilities for the music program. Under provisions from this Budget, the remaining classrooms at Hambleton State School are to be airconditioned. At the Flying Fish Point State School, funds have been provided to complete the amenities block, along with the provision of teaching space to allow for the enhancement of the school's library. I am also informed by the Minister that minor works are to be carried out at the Innisfail State School to construct a covered area to cater for students' shelter during the prolonged wet season. Also in Innisfail, funding has been set aside to assist local families by assigning four child health nurses to conduct the Positive Parenting Program.

In the community of Yarrabah, it has been recognised that there exists a disturbing drug and alcohol problem, and the Budget has provided funds to assist in the battle against substance abuse. A specialist alcohol and drug worker will be employed at Yarrabah. I welcome this initiative. Hopefully it will have the same positive impact as measures funded by the current Deputy Premier, the Honourable Jim Elder, when he was Health Minister in the Goss Government, which had a significant impact on suicide

rates within the community. Of course, drug and alcohol abuse must be addressed on a whole-of-community, whole-of-Government basis. I therefore urge the Yarrabah community to support the appointed worker as he or she takes on this challenging position.

Funds from programs administered by the Minister for Primary Industries and the Minister for Public Works will see the construction of a classroom workshop to enhance the delivery of Gordonvale High School's agricultural science program. In all, this Budget sees a record \$15.2m investment in the educational future of students in my electorate.

The regular supply of electricity to the far north and to Cairns and its environs has also been addressed in this Budget. The expenditure of \$15m to construct a new transmission line from Chalumbin to Springmount as part of Powerlink's Cairns reinforcement Stage 2 is welcome news. As so correctly pointed out in the Cairns Post editorial of 19 July—

"This Budget also finally has tackled the long-neglected task of upgrading the State's hard-pressed electricity infrastructure."

And further—

"Other than commissioning a couple of small gas turbine generators at Townsville as a stop-gap measure, Mr Borbidge effectively did little else to upgrade the State's electrical capacity."

The Beattie Government—and in particular the Minister for Mines and Energy, Tony McGrady—has taken positive steps to both boost and diversify the generation of power in Queensland. Without adequate and reliable power supplies, the economy of this State would be limited indeed.

In a similar vein, the provision of modern transport infrastructure is vital to our future. The 2000 Budget sees record spending on both road and rail projects which will deliver real benefits to Mulgrave and the far north. Some \$80m will be expended on upgrading the Townsville-Cairns rail line, and a further \$51m will be put into the tilt train rolling stock. Over 100 jobs during the construction phase will be an additional outcome of this project. On top of this, the region's tourist industry receives a boost through the provision of affordable and faster train travel.

The Innisfail railway station is to get a \$200,000 facelift, which will include raising the platform to reduce problems that passengers have experienced accessing and alighting from trains. The City of Innisfail also receives a boost through the allocation of a \$1.5m subsidy to complement funds provided by Johnstone Shire Council to revamp the city centre streetscape. I wish to record my appreciation of the efforts of former Johnstone Shire Councillor George Pervan, who lobbied me to arrange a deputation to Local Government Minister Mackenroth during a parliamentary sitting. His championing of the project, which will uplift the presentation of the CBD, has borne fruit.

An improvement of the traffic flow into the City of Cairns for my constituents can be expected with the \$6m four-laning of the Portsmouth road link. This complements the construction of additional traffic lanes on the Bruce Highway from Anderson Street to Cannon Park. Much of the funding comes from the Federal Government through Commonwealth/State arrangements. However, traffic congestion into Cairns from the south can be relieved only by the delivery of a costly multimodal transport corridor. The State is doing its part by undergoing consultation and planning to arrive at the best option supported by the community. At the conclusion of this process, the ball will be firmly in the court of the Federal Government.

Funding responsibility for the Bruce Highway lies with the Commonwealth. \$0.9m has been made available to construct passing lanes as the initial expenditure of a \$3.5m overall project within the Mulgrave electorate. The Moller Road project will help relieve motorists' frustration, as genuinely safe passing opportunities are in short supply on the Bruce Highway, which is experiencing considerable growth in vehicle usage.

May I take a moment to express my appreciation to the Department of Main Roads, which responded so quickly to my request to identify significant stretches of pavement breakdown. Once the State received funding from the Commonwealth, the necessary roadworks were commenced immediately. I acknowledge that delays and disruption to traffic have been exacerbated by the out-of-season wet weather, but I am sure that all of us who travel the road on a regular basis will welcome the improved condition of the road surface.

The \$1.3m project to construct a bridge over Middle Creek on the Pine Creek-Yarrabah road will remove a safety problem, to the benefit of residents of East Trinity and Yarrabah. This work complements further work to be carried out on widening the shoulders of the Cairns side of the Yarrabah Range road. The community of Yarrabah will welcome the \$70,000 set aside to further enhance the road to Back Beach. The allocation of \$90,000 to relieve drainage problems which plague roads in Yarrabah township fulfils a commitment that I gave to the community council following Cyclone Steve earlier this year.

The seaside township of Bramston Beach is isolated each year by flooding over the road which connects it to the community of Miriwinni. \$2.6m has been provided in this year's Budget to construct a new bridge and approaches over the Russell River. The total value of the project is \$3.85m. Further spending on the \$6.95m realignment of a section of the Palmerston Highway reduces safety concerns on this busy thoroughfare, which connects the Johnstone Shire to the hinterland. On the subject of safety, the provision of \$70,000 to assist the Cairns City Council in construction of safe bikeways for the young and not so young in Centenary Park is money well spent.

Being someone who spent his childhood in public housing, I am acutely aware of the need for Government to provide affordable accommodation opportunities. The electorate of Mulgrave will share in a \$14.7m boost to public housing in far-north Queensland. In the face of declining support for public housing from the Howard Government, Housing Minister Robert Swarten has again delivered to Queensland's battlers. His determination to see accommodation justice for those requiring public housing is in direct contrast to the mean-spirited approach of the former Borbidge Government, which did its very best to force people into the private sector. This Budget provides \$87.9m for new public housing across the State, \$78.5m to upgrade existing stock, \$70.6m for maintenance and \$17.9m for community housing projects. The share for the far north is \$5.8m for 27 new dwellings, \$4.9m for upgrades, \$4m for maintenance and \$1.3m for community housing. This is good news for the far north.

One aspect contained in the Budget documents which I believe will assist primary producers in my electorate is the transfer of the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority, QRAA, from Treasury into the Primary Industries portfolio. I am on record as being critical of its former place within Treasury, as I believe that the people within Treasury, although very good with dollars and cents, had very little understanding of what it was like to operate a small business such as a farm. The transfer of QRAA back into Primary Industries should see a better return to those primary producers who each year are hit by natural disaster.

I am pleased to say that the funding provided by this Budget sees the final delivery of election commitments made by the Government at the by-election in December 1998 which saw my return to this Chamber as the member for Mulgrave. There is justifiable cynicism by voters in the promises made by political parties and politicians. However, I am proud to say that the Premier has given every support to ensure all commitments have been delivered in full and, more significantly, well inside the term of the Government. The allocation of \$1.5m for the construction of a new 24-hour police station at Edmonton delivers an important facility to one of the region's fastest growing residential areas.

In closing, I congratulate the Treasurer on bringing down a responsible Budget which delivers real benefits to Queensland. The provision of 357 extra police, 1,000 extra health workers and 800 extra teachers will ensure that Queenslanders receive the return for their taxpayer dollars they deserve.

It is a shame that members opposite continue to be so negative. They continue to talk Queensland down at every opportunity. The Beattie Government is a Government with its eyes on the future. The \$300m package of programs aimed at supporting Queensland families, combined with additional spending on education, health and community services, is an indication that this Government has got it right. Budget 2000 delivers a strong economic boost via a record Capital Works Program alongside a forward-thinking social infrastructure program. I commend the Bills to the House.

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