



Speech by

Miss FIONA SIMPSON

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard 28 November 2001

APPROPRIATION BILL [No. 2]; APPROPRIATION [PARLIAMENT] BILL [No. 2]

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (3.52 p.m.): In rising to speak in the debate on the appropriation bills I will address a few areas in my portfolio responsibilities as well as issues of concern to the wider regional constituency of the Sunshine Coast and the specific constituency of Maroochydore.

We know that there are incredible unemployment problems in many areas outside of Brisbane. Despite the sunshine and the lovely amenity of the Sunshine Coast, the area has one of the highest unemployment rates in Queensland. The state average of 8.8 per cent pales into insignificance when compared with the 13 per cent unemployment on the Sunshine Coast. The youth unemployment figure is far higher than that. The area is paradise for many, but there are others who really do not have a lot in their pockets and who do want to work. They need governments to work with the community and with business to facilitate opportunities. In the electorate of Maroochydore, for example, unemployment is at 14.3 per cent. That represents a lot of people who want work and who are looking for work. These people need government to work with business to facilitate opportunities.

The Sunshine Coast does need attention in terms of the creation of real job opportunities. While training and apprenticeships and lifting the educational standard of the community are essential, work opportunities need to be present in order to keep people locally when they do meet those training requirements. I highlight the significant infrastructure and capital works programs instituted in Brisbane, such as the \$24 million footbridge, the \$260 million arts precinct, the \$280 million Lang Park development and a range of other projects which represent a significant capital injection into the Brisbane area. When we start to break down the unemployment figures for Brisbane we realise how much better Brisbane is doing than many other parts of Queensland, particularly the Sunshine Coast.

There really is a very strong case for saying that the government needs to be putting infrastructure into the regions—into places such as the Sunshine Coast and other regions—that will have significant flow-on benefits to the community and will create real jobs. There has been a call, for example, for assistance towards an arts and convention centre on the Sunshine Coast. While I acknowledge that more work needs to be done at the local level to attract private enterprise, I still urge the state government to look at the funds it should be making available to help. It was able to help with the Gold Coast Convention Centre. We would like to see the same sort of assistance for something like that on the Sunshine Coast.

The tourism industry often has a lot of peaks and troughs. We need to create an industry that provides greater job security throughout the year. The convention market needs to be developed in order to achieve a more consistent work force and opportunity throughout the year. The figures clearly show that there is potential for this. This is something that does need significant infrastructure. The role of government is to partner with the community and with business. I certainly urge the government to look at that. Other infrastructure projects on the Sunshine Coast need the state government's stamp and an acknowledgment that they are to the benefit of the region. We need some commitment and a time frame for putting those in place.

Roads are fundamental to economic development. The traffic growth rates on the roads around our area are quite phenomenal. While I am very appreciative of the upgrades of Maroochydore Road—it is something I fought hard for; it was something like a \$28 million upgrade—that road was well and truly over its capacity as a two-lane road. It is now a four-lane road. Other two-lane roads are

significantly over their capacity. The accident, death and injury rates testify to the fact that the problem needs to be addressed.

There is a planning study under way, which I welcome, in relation to the Sunshine Motorway. It will look at a range of things relating to the upgrade of the Sunshine Motorway, such as the design of the interchanges. This is necessary, because some of the access routes will not stay the same. There will be changes to some of the access ramps, particularly if there is a new interchange or a partial connection from a proposed southern access when the council puts that project together. I urge the government to once again put this in the budget papers and commit towards the upgrade of the Sunshine Motorway. This road is currently very dangerous. There may be limited access, but these are two-lane roads and they carry heavy traffic. Unfortunately, human beings do not always drive as safely as they should. That is why roads have to be designed to a higher and higher standard. The number of white crosses at the side of a number of Sunshine Coast roads is really tragic.

Public transport is an ongoing issue. When we compare the public transport subsidies available in Brisbane with those available in the regions, particularly an area such as the Sunshine Coast, we realise that the regions are dipping out. One could travel for over an hour and still not get from one end of the Sunshine Coast to the other. The region is vast and public transport is inadequate. Public assistance is needed in order to maintain basic routes. I know that the current assistance is not adequate. There would be no argument about that from people who live there. Particularly the elderly, those who cannot afford a car, those who are not well enough to drive and young people are disadvantaged by bad public transport. Facilitating and developing a solution to this issue is certainly a role for government. While the CAMCOS planning study was undertaken—another planning study—there needs to be a commitment to implementation of a system. We still have not seen that. We have seen some funds put towards improving signalisation. That is great, but we need to see a significant program for implementation so that we know this is not just another planning study gathering dust.

Even with the existing infrastructure, a lot can be done in terms of better coordination. I have said that before in this parliament. I am pleased to see that there is a new connecting service. From December, Sunbus will connect Maroochydore to the railway station. It is not rocket science to improve those existing coordinating routes. The current process is laborious and still less than adequate when we consider that a lot more could be done with existing infrastructure.

There is another planning study on the railway to look at how the north coast line can be improved. Given that it does not have a lot of overtaking sections, the fact is that improvements can be made to the efficiency of the existing infrastructure. Once again, that is good, but we need to see an upgrade to the north coast railway line.

Currently, the Gold Coast services run on the half hour at peak times. The Sunshine Coast does not even have an hourly service. It is not only the issue of the infrastructure to the north of Brisbane that should be looked at but also the issue of the end of the funnel going into Brisbane. The issue of the adequacy of the rail infrastructure with the northern routes, the freight routes and the passenger routes coming into Brisbane should be considered. The government should ensure that there is a planning and implementation process for the building of infrastructure so that the routes from the north will have access into Brisbane, because currently that service is inadequate. The services are good to the south, but to the north it is not happening.

This is an opportunity to improve people's quality of life and it has economic advantages as well. There are many people who would take the opportunity to travel further north by train if there was a proper service. A railway line which does not allow trains to travel faster than 50 kilometres an hour in some sections because they are on the old 1880s alignment is not adequate. It must be upgraded. It needs a commitment from the government—and we are still waiting for that.

In regard to the environment, I am pleased to acknowledge the extension of the Mount Coolum National Park. There has been an extension over what was previously unallocated Crown land. I have asked the Environment Minister for advice on the amount of extra funding which will be needed towards the management of that park. Obviously there is a need to look at management issues such as the trails and the support infrastructure. It is no good just saying, 'We have got a national park'; we must try to truly conserve it in a way that is in the public interest. To date, I have not received that response. I look forward to it, because we do not want to see paper entries on new national parks without the funding to go along with it. We need to ensure that these areas really are conserved to the standard that is expected by the community.

I acknowledge also the new Trails organisation. I was pleased to attend the launch of the Trails organisation at Coolum recently. I paid my \$2 to sign up and belong because I think their concept of extending the Trails Network on the Sunshine Coast is great. I can put my hiking boots on in anticipation. A lot of us love getting out there and bushwalking. A lot of our public areas need good tracks that protect the environment, and this group is certainly keen to identify those and to work with whoever has an interest in developing the Trails Network. I believe it is something that has great tourism

potential. We are blessed with so many natural assets throughout Queensland and certainly on the Sunshine Coast. To have better forms of access that also look after the environment I believe will be a win-win situation.

The issue of water quality has been raised recently in the parliament and certainly in the media on the Sunshine Coast. I think that this is timely. The state government subsidises local government in regard to sewerage disposal and so on. The issue of waste traps and the quality of the water that flows back into the river certainly is one that involves tremendous cooperation between all levels of government, particularly between state and local government. I would urge a review of the current mechanism for subsidising local government. I would also suggest that this is something that needs to be clearly looked at if we are to help people to comply, and have the resources to comply, with the relevant regulations. We want to see our waterways looked after. We want to make sure that the wildlife, the fish and indeed the entire natural environment is as pristine as possible, not just for our own sake but for the sake of future generations.

In regard to health, my colleague the Opposition Leader has already touched on these issues. However, I need to really bring home to this parliament: what sort of priorities does this government have when it can fund extra bureaucrats in Queensland Health but somehow it cannot fund extra doctors and nurses and many other critical care frontline staff? There was a net increase of 300 bureaucrats in Queensland Health in the last year and about 30 extra nurses. I think it is pretty clear that things are out of whack when Queensland Health is able to find the funds to put on more bureaucrats but it cannot put extra staff into areas such as accident and emergency and other areas of the hospital system and the wider community health system.

Is it any wonder that nurses and a lot of other health professionals do not want to work in the public health system when they know that at the pointy end of service, the funding is not flowing through. It is not flowing through. The Health Minister comes in here and blames a worldwide nursing shortage, and then I talk to a local nurse and she will say, 'You know, we're really at our wit's end. We can't even get agreement for getting time off to go and get some training.' They cannot even get some assistance towards doing training; they cannot get any improvement in the access to training. They cannot even get time off to do that. Then they find that if they do in their own time go and get that training, they do not necessarily get recognition or any reimbursement from Queensland Health. There are a lot of people who feel that they are not being appreciated, that they are placed in a situation of undue stress, and when the numbers do get thin it is a very difficult place for them to work.

I believe there is a lot more that can be done in the area of training and in the area of better management within Queensland Health. Certainly a lot more can be done regarding the prioritisation of funds. This government can find the funds for the \$24 million footbridge, it can find the funds for extra bureaucrats and it can create an extra level of management in Queensland Health, but when it comes to what counts—extra doctors and nurses—it is sadly lacking. That is in black and white, that is in statistics, and it cannot be denied that that is the case. If you talk to people at the grassroots, you find that they are fed up with it, and they deserve better. When these issues hit the fan, as we saw with the tragic circumstances of Janaya Clarke's killer going interstate, the Health Minister is often absent and not available for media comment. Unfortunately, that is true of many other tragic incidents as well. We have heard about the transplant unit at the Royal Brisbane Hospital and the fact that people have been dying waiting to get access to beds there.

In regard to police, if I can return to the Sunshine Coast, it is a strange situation when the Sunshine Coast water police have to travel up to 20 minutes to get to the water. I would strongly suggest that is an indication of the need for a new police station—a police station on the water. Currently, the water police on the Sunshine Coast are based at Kawana. It is not a quick drive to get to the water from Kawana by road, particularly at peak holiday time. This issue must be addressed. Once again, the government must show its commitment to the Sunshine Coast—and we are waiting.

Our local tourism industry will receive a boost from CHOGM. As I have said, that event will present a lot of job opportunities, though obviously we want to see the sort of jobs developed in the industry that give greater security of tenure and opportunity. CHOGM is a terrific opportunity for Queensland. It is a great opportunity for the Sunshine Coast. It is something that we welcome, and we know that a great deal has been done to address the security issues and the transport issues and everything that is associated with what will be a world event. There is a very short lead time. I acknowledge that the Tourism Minister is in the chamber.

We are going to need assistance to maximise the tourism opportunities presented by CHOGM. As I say, there is a very short lead time, and we are keen to ensure that we gain as much as possible from this event. Certainly any assistance that the state can provide in terms of coordination or even by way of additional marketing funds towards that will certainly be welcome. This is a time when Queensland, and certainly the Sunshine Coast, can shine. I was at the Hyatt Coolom the other evening. It is an outstanding facility. I have spoken to them about their preparations for this event. Much has already been done in preparation for the original booking. Twin Waters was also a part of

that. The wider Sunshine Coast will certainly benefit from the publicity surrounding the event. There are people who will have to stay at other facilities. Queensland will certainly benefit. We just need to ensure that we are not left short-changed leading up to the event. We must have the necessary funding to get the marketing right, to get the ongoing message right in order to get the most out of CHOGM.

The young people in our community are certainly another issue of concern. Most kids are great kids. But those kids who do not have a lot of wisdom and who make mistakes look to adults to give them a hand. When I see some of the beautiful youth organisations in our community, the thing that often strikes me is that, if there is anything wrong with youth, it is not really the youth; it is the adults who are not getting alongside kids and giving more of their time. Those who do that need to be commended. Young people need adults to give them their time. I commend to this House and to the minister—I have met with Matt Foley about this—the need for a youth site on the central Sunshine Coast area. We have literally hundreds of kids on the streets who are out to have a good time. We have wonderful public areas, but these kids need places where they can meet safely and without some of the less than desirable older people who seek to take advantage of them. We need to come up with better solutions. A very good organisation is seeking to do that. I support that organisation and encourage everybody else to do likewise.

The government has a role to facilitate and encourage business and to help people as much as possible reach full employment, but it also has to recognise that the vulnerable need the safety net of government. Certainly, the disabled fall into that category, and their carers definitely also fall into that category. I do not believe that the circumstances of a lot of carers and their families have improved over the past 10 years. If anything, their circumstances seem to be getting worse. We have seen the Endeavour Foundation come under a tremendous amount of strain. I have talked to families and they are desperate for respite and they are desperate to know that there will be future placements for their children. When I talk to people who are in their late 70s, who are the sole carer for a disabled child and do not yet have a guarantee of a placement for their child, I know that they need a better solution from the government. I am urging the government to come up with more funding, certainly on the Sunshine Coast area, to help with better supported accommodation services so that people can have that peace of mind. Respite in particular is something that those people are desperate for. Because of the problems with the Endeavour Foundation, they have lost their respite facilities. That is causing an incredible strain.

We need to be a caring community that helps to sustain people. We want people to be able to remain in their homes happily and safely for as long as possible.
