



Speech by

**ROSA LEE LONG**

**MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS**

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Hansard 21 June 2001

**BUDGET DEBATE 2001**

**Ms LEE LONG** (Tablelands—ONP) (8.52 p.m.): After listening to my first budget in this House, I can only say that, from a far northerner's point of view, I am very disappointed with it. I find it uninspiring, mundane and unhelpful at a time when help is most needed.

This budget places much emphasis on information and biotechnology while the Capital Works Program shows the usual overwhelming bias in favour of projects in the south-east corner of the state. Once again our fears are confirmed that, despite its claims to the contrary, this government is really not interested in rural and regional Queensland, and especially the more remote areas such as those that exist in my electorate of Tablelands. There is very little in this budget to enthuse my constituents.

Because governments, both Labor and coalition, state and federal, have by their anti-rural policies caused the demise of our timber and tobacco industries and gutted our once-profitable dairy industry, my electorate has to rely substantially on what is left of our primary industries to survive: industries such as general farming and beef production, fruit and vegetable production, cane farming and pork and poultry production. But where in the budget is there any real assistance that is so badly needed by these industries? I do not see in the budget any help for those Queenslanders. They are rural people who have worked hard all their lives and provided jobs for other Queenslanders on their farms, in mills and factories and in myriad small businesses further along the production chain. Yet, despite their dedication and despite their sacrifices to keep the large cities supplied with goods, they are repaid with a budget such as this—a budget that gives them virtually nothing.

People in rural, regional and remote areas of this state are desperately waiting for a government that is sympathetic to their needs. They want a government that will work with them and not consistently against them. Our farmers are not asking for million-dollar subsidies such as they get in America. All they want is a fair farm gate price that will allow them to gain a reasonable living from the land. They want a return to life as it was before national competition policy was thrust upon them, and before deregulation and government intervention ruined their livelihoods.

But does this budget give any major relief for the rural sector? It does not! Is there any relief for farmers threatened with increased rates for water, the lifeblood of the farming industry? There is not! Is there any further assistance for dairy farmers and tobacco growers driven to desperation by deregulation? There is not! Is there any real assistance for our foundering mining industry? No! As with the rural industry, there is nothing to ease its burden. There is the case of the Golden Circle cannery on the Tablelands. That is not mentioned in the budget. How can industries such as this hope to compete with slave labour countries when our governments drop all tariffs and allow their cheap imports into this country? This is condoning slave labour.

Our public hospitals and dental clinics have been contentious issues for a long time. The Health Minister continually tells us that problems with these facilities are figments of our imagination and that there is nothing wrong with our health system. According to her, there are no waiting lists and there are no shortages of staff, equipment or services. If it is not a figment of our imagination, then it is all the fault of the federal government. However, I always thought that Health was one of the state's main responsibilities.

The extra \$5 million in funding in the budget to increase the availability of oral services in Queensland is but a pittance and will apply to specific clinics only from Bundaberg south. The north

misses out yet again. There is nothing in the budget to show real commitment by the Beattie government to encourage the training of more Queensland doctors and dentists to fill the many vacancies that exist in this state with a view to cutting the waiting lists to both public hospitals and dental clinics.

Complaints of cost cutting in public hospitals abound because of lack of funds. I am even getting complaints about the Cairns Base Hospital, which I am sure are caused by a lack of funds, staff and equipment. At the Atherton Hospital, the cost cutting has gone so far as to result in the moving of maternity patients into public wards on occasions. It is becoming ridiculous. Many tableland maternity patients are sent long distances to Cairns Base Hospital because the services required are now not provided on the tablelands. This causes my constituents considerable inconvenience. We want funding to allow those services to be available in our tableland hospitals.

The budget does provide for new ambulance centres for Atherton, Millaa Millaa and Mount Garnet. Those projects are to be commended but, apart from them, I see no joy for other public health problems.

This budget shows that, once again, the lion's share of real funding is going to the south-east corner. Even though the Transport Minister comes from far-north Queensland, he does not seem to know where the Tablelands electorate is situated. The Premier, our own home-town boy, has all but forgotten the place that gave him his start in life.

The Transport Minister does not care that cane trucks thunder along day and night, 24 hours a day, during the cane harvesting season on roads not built to take the weight of those huge trucks. Also, there seems to be little consideration given to the fact that some of those roads are in the wettest part of Queensland. Some of the road foundations being put down in our wettest areas are far from adequate. People have witnessed new sections of road being patched up almost as soon as the bitumen has dried. At the same time, councils need assistance with funding for their road infrastructure requirements.

I note in the budget details that Petersen Creek bridge in the township of Yungaburra is to be upgraded. This will be a much-needed improvement for the area. Similarly, I see \$10 million has been allocated for detailed planning for a start in 2002-2003 of construction of a new high-level bridge over the South Johnstone River at the South Johnstone sugar mill. I also commend plans for more heavy vehicle warning signs for the Palmerston Highway, as there have been a number of deaths on this section of road.

Apart from those good works, there are many areas that need looking at for road funding. They include the Kennedy Highway west of Mount Garnet, which is now being used extensively by large trucks and semitrailers taking produce south. This part of the highway is still a single lane and locals have expressed considerable concern at the problems of passing. The Gilles Highway from the top of the range to Yungaburra is another road that needs attention, while the Millaa Millaa to Malanda road is again breaking up badly. The Herberton to Irvinebank road could do with upgrading to encourage use of the tourist ring-road route through to Chillagoe, and there is still a section of the Mareeba to Chillagoe road that is not sealed. If tourism is to be the way of the future, then the road network will need extensive funding.

Regarding rail transport, the minister is so tight with his money that he cannot even provide some extra rail wagons to be available on stand-by to carry stock, that is cattle and pigs in particular, to and from Innisfail. Unless wagons are supplied urgently, the viability of cattle saleyards at Mareeba could be threatened. Southern buyers use rail transport as the only viable means of moving stock. Moving them by road is too costly and would only put more heavy vehicles on our roads. Similar problems beset the carriage of pigs between the tablelands and southern centres. Considering that a large portion of the state's wealth is created in rural and regional Queensland, surely our rural people deserve more consideration where rail and road transportation is concerned. After all, most public transport in Brisbane is subsidised.

In conclusion, I believe that this budget proves that the Beattie Labor government is not a government for all Queenslanders. It appears that if people do not live in the Sunshine Coast-Brisbane-Gold Coast strip they may as well not be Queenslanders.

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