



Speech by

Mr T. MALONE

MEMBER FOR MIRANI

Hansard 22 June 2001

BUDGET DEBATE 2001

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (3.00 p.m.): It is a pleasure to rise today to speak on the first budget of the 50th Parliament. Unfortunately, from my perspective, the budget is without vision and condemns the state of Queensland to another 12 months of short-term government schemes which provide nothing to address the problems facing Queensland and Queenslanders at this time.

I have to say that, from my perspective, the budget is nothing but a smoke and mirrors budget. It has blown the budget on capital works spending in Brisbane city. It does nothing to address our rising unemployment rate, which is the worst in Australia. But we have been given a bridge that goes nowhere and an expensive Clayton's stadium, paid for partly by new taxes which we were not going to have. There does seem to be plenty of money for training but little chance of a job at the end of that training. That is fairly typical of a Labor budget.

Having said that, I would like to move on to the issues that affect my electorate. In particular, the increased budget allocations in Brisbane have been at the expense of my electorate of Mirani, and particularly the Mackay region generally. That is very disappointing and, I believe, in some ways discriminatory. The allocation of 42 per cent of the \$5.115 billion capital works program to the Brisbane statistical division does show a priority of this government for that area. One has to bias that with the fact that, in the last two years, included in that statistical region has been a substantial amount of money that has been put into the Gold Coast motorway, which is now finished. So that bias should have actually reduced somewhat. In a state the size of Queensland, how can any government justify the spending of that proportion of the capital works budget in one area?

I will draw attention to the Mackay statistical division, which covers a fair amount of my electorate. We have seen a decrease in the capital works allocation from \$217.4 million in 2000-01 to \$213.8 million in 2001-02. This equates to decreased spending of \$235 per capita for the region in one year, from \$1,760 per capita to \$1,525 per capita. I have to say that, from my perspective, this is a real test of the budget, and unfortunately it fails. How can a decrease in capital works in our area be justified when \$119 million has been allocated to the Suncorp-Metway Lang Park stadium redevelopment alone? That is more than half the allocation for my entire region. It does not really matter what set of figures we look at, the Mackay statistical region has gone backwards. And how any Labor member, including you, Madam Deputy Speaker, could stand in this place and say that regional areas have done extremely well out of this budget is beyond me and absolutely unbelievable.

Mr Mackenroth: I thought the redevelopment of the Suncorp-Metway stadium was actually a pretty big issue in Mackay at the last election.

Mr MALONE: It was.

Mr Mackenroth: You had Martin Bella running, and he made it a central part of his campaign and he got walloped.

Mr MALONE: I do not think it was for that reason alone. The Treasurer might like to hang his hat on that, but unfortunately he does not have the right argument there.

Despite the urgent need in my electorate for a police station in Sarina, that was not part of the budget. As you would well know, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Mackay-Bucasia road is a high priority. As I understand it, there is a roundabout to be built there, which is good, but it is certainly not

addressing the real problems of that road. And there was no provision in the budget to relocate or rebuild the Queensland Ambulance Service headquarters in Mackay. Mackay got some money—\$4.8 million—towards the \$11.4 million extension to the courthouse. That is great. However, only \$100,000 has been allocated this year towards the much-publicised North Mackay police station. That was a really big issue in that North Mackay region, but \$100,000 would hardly mow the lawn there for 12 months.

Mr Mackenroth: That would be the plans.

Mr MALONE: That is right.

Mr Mackenroth: You've got to start somewhere.

Mr MALONE: You would hardly mow the lawn for that. As I said, the North Mackay police station—

Mr Mackenroth: You need the plans before you build the building. You actually do need plans first.

Mr MALONE: If they cannot build a building quicker than that, the Treasurer ought to sack a few people.

Mr Mackenroth interjected.

Mr MALONE: Time is running out, so I had better keep going. We all know that the North Mackay police station was a huge issue, and promises were made. I accept what the Treasurer is saying; \$100,000 is certainly a step in the right direction. That is more than what a few other things in the Mackay district got, so let us be grateful for small mercies, I suppose. How much of the footbridge across the river would that \$100,000 buy? About a foot of it! North Mackay is a growing area, and the new subdivisions in the northern beaches have created a whole new aspect, so servicing that area is becoming more and more difficult in terms of police and emergency services. I am disappointed that only \$100,000 has been allocated in the first year, and I hope that building can be built fairly quickly.

As I said earlier, there was no allocation for the much-needed upgrade and replacement of the police station at Sarina. Our police officers have been operating out of that station for a long time. It is a very outdated, extremely cramped facility. I would hope that, in the near future, we can find some necessary expenditure to make that police station a far better place for those people to work in. The police in Sarina do a magnificent job on a very busy highway.

The Mackay-Bucasia road is a single access road. It was hoped that some four-laning would be done there. But, unfortunately, in the budget papers I see no special allocation of funding for that. That will be a huge issue in the future as that much-used road becomes more and more prone to traffic congestion. During the February state election, the National Party gave an undertaking that not only the North Mackay police station but also the four-laning of that highway would be a high priority under the coalition.

It was also disappointing that provision was not made for the Queensland Ambulance Service to have a new building built in Mackay. That is also causing response times to blow out in the Walkerston area and that is becoming a fairly big issue in that community, which also is a growing part of the Mackay district.

The leasing of the Dalrymple Bay coal terminal is the only thing that stands between a very mediocre budget and an absolute disaster. The infusion of \$700 million into the bottom line of an \$820 million deficit budget makes it almost respectable. Had not this extreme measure taken place, it would have been a very different story. I just wonder what we are going to have to flog off next year to balance the books.

In last year's budget Labor played a cruel hoax on businesses by claiming that it had reduced payroll tax. Certainly it did, but only marginally. However, at the same time it included superannuation in the calculations. This effectively meant that many businesses paid payroll tax for the first time. I can tell members that I got plenty of calls about that. And members would not want to know about it, but the government has done it again! This time the Treasurer has announced a reduction in the effective rate next year. But now, as I understand it, capital gains and fringe benefits are going to be built into the equation. Again, I believe that business has been sold a pup. It is about time Labor realised that we must have a strong, viable business community to create employment. And perhaps that is where the problem lies. The government has to be warned: you can outsmart yourself when you try to con the electorate, but the reality is that you are just making it more and more difficult for business to operate and maintain employment, let alone create jobs.

One of the big issues in the Mackay district during the last election campaign was the priority of a drug court for the region. The court would cover not just Mackay but also the Sarina and Proserpine areas. I am disappointed that no move was made to try to address that in some way during this budget. There is a group that operates in the Mackay district to promote the establishment of drug courts and rehabilitation centres. They call themselves DRAG—Drug Rehabilitation and Action Group.

They are volunteers in our community who are doing one hell of a good job in making people aware of the issues surrounding drugs in our community. They just have to keep fighting to make sure that, sooner or later, somebody recognises the real plight of those who are affected by drug use in our district.

I turn to a few issues that touch on the rural community that is such a big part of my electorate. We heard the question this morning directed to the Environment Minister regarding pigs in national parks. Unfortunately, the pigs do not stick to the national parks; they wander around a bit outside them. Foot-and-mouth disease is a huge problem in other parts of the world. If that disease ever were to enter Australia, the pigs would be one means of spreading it throughout this country. Unless we take some steps now or very shortly to look at methods of eradicating pigs in forestry areas, in national parks or even outside those locations, we will face a huge problem. I know it is a difficult matter, but sooner or later it must be addressed.

Some imported pests are really running riot throughout our rural communities. Giant rat-tail grass is spreading very quickly throughout Queensland. It is almost impossible to eradicate. It competes very effectively on pastoral land. It will be a really difficult problem to overcome. Unfortunately, there does not seem to be any method of dealing with this pest on the horizon. Any current means of controlling it also affects pasture grass and anything else that grows. There is no funding in the budget to address that problem. There are also things like sickle pod and the old favourite we have in Brisbane now, fire ants, which can have a huge impact throughout rural and even urban Queensland. I know that this problem requires a coordinated approach across Australia, but the fact of the matter is that we have the problem in Queensland and we need to fix it now. If we wait till the spring, those ants will keep spreading. I was disappointed that more attention was not paid to those sorts of matters in the budget. They would have ensured that there is not a depreciating future effect on employment, et cetera.

As time is running short, I would like to address a few provisions in the budget with respect to my shadow portfolio areas of responsibility. Obviously they will be addressed in detail during the estimates hearing. Emergency Services incorporates the statutory authorities of the Queensland Ambulance Service, the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority and the counter-disaster and rescue services. This portfolio provides essential public services and either delivers directly or funds a range of necessary services. These services seek to prevent in the first instance, or minimise the impact of, emergencies and disasters as well as minimising the impact of emergencies and disasters. I seek leave to incorporate the remainder of my speech in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

I would like to take some time today to address my shadow portfolio of Emergency Services. Emergency Services incorporates the statutory authorities of the Queensland Ambulance Service, the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority and the counter-disaster and rescue services. This is a portfolio that provides essential public safety services and either directly delivers or funds a range of necessary services. These services seek to prevent, in the first instance, or minimise the impact of emergencies and disasters as well as minimising the impact of emergencies and disasters. Every community in Queensland is serviced and are vital in ensuring the safety of the community, protecting the environment and protecting property. And I take this opportunity to commend all emergency service personnel in Queensland for the great work that they do, especially the great work of the volunteers in our state.

It is because of this level of service and the importance of the emergency services to Queensland that I find it difficult to comprehend the Beattie Government's lack of commitment to providing adequate funding for the upkeep of staff and resources for the services.

Recently the Queensland Ambulance Employee's Union undertook a survey of members that revealed major problems amongst their members. More than 90% of officers believe that patient care is being compromised because of a lack of resources—that is 90% of officers in Queensland. On release of the survey, the Secretary of the Ambulance Employees Australia, Mr Steve Crow, said that problems in the QAS would continue until funding issues were resolved once and for all—well he must have been a very disappointed man on Tuesday night.

The survey highlighted frightening statistics, some of which I will share with the House today—

91.28% reported that in their experience patient care had been compromised because of a lack of resources eg poor equipment and inadequate vehicles;

66.42% reported problems with their vehicles. This included 30.06% who said the vehicle they used needed immediate replacement;

91.95% believed if they had to retire early their superannuation would be inadequate;

64.73% said they had suffered stress that led to time off work or should have—of this 64.73%, only 52.5% said they had sought help for stress;

81.48% said they did not believe that the ambulance service promoted a culture of cooperation and good management;

These results are incredibly disturbing. Day after day, the Beattie Government is hanging these people out to dry. There has been no support for them and there is nothing in this Budget that addresses these concerns adequately. Nothing.

I have raised these staff shortages with the Minister time and time again, yet the Minister is still not addressing the problem. Who knows what disaster has to happen before the Minister will act on this matter. There was one positive aspect of the Budget in terms of the QAS and that was that the Government will undertake a 'second annual staff satisfaction survey'—positive in terms of the survey being conducted and yet to be seen whether the outcomes from the Government is a positive.

One of the biggest problems is officers having to be OIC of a rural community QAS station and on call for extended periods of time.

It is of extreme concern to all Queenslanders that our QAS is being underfunded and understaffed at any time. My concern also lies in the added burden on the QAS with the holding of both the Goodwill Games and CHOGM in Brisbane this year. If our ambulance service is stretched to the limits now, how is it supposed to cope with this extra burden on its resources? QAS is at the cutting edge of services to the community and has never really addressed the added impost of the loss of positive contribution of pensioners and senior cardholders made to the financial support of QAS. Many of these people have told me they would rather pay something than have the prospect of not being able to get an ambulance when they want one.

This Budget has done nothing to address the concerns of the QAS and I find it difficult to believe how the Minister responsible can travel the state and deliver a couple of new vehicles and claim everything is well in the QAS. The National Party has always pushed that adequate numbers of trained staff should be available to attend emergencies, obviously this is not something the Labor Party hold to. The Minister has grossly let down the member of the QAS and the people of Queensland by not providing more money for further services. The Government has failed to provide adequate staff and it has failed to provide adequate equipment for the day-to-day running of the QAS.

This Budget has also shortchanged the State Emergency Services in the provision of equipment. This Government has set aside only \$2 million over two years for the whole of the state in emergency services. This is only \$1 million for emergency equipment for the whole of Queensland, hopelessly inadequate. All Queenslanders rely on the services of the SES and I for one would hope that they were properly equipped, obviously this Government does not agree with me. I mean this million will not go very far when you consider the individual cost of the equipment that the Government identified within the Budget—personal protective equipment (overalls, boots, helmets, safety glasses) for SES volunteers statewide; wet weather clothing to benefit 2,500 volunteers statewide; Safety at Height equipment for 180 SES Groups; and the issue of new and replacement of communications equipment to 49 SES groups throughout the state. With the huge responsibility on the SES and the outstanding work they do for Queensland and Queenslanders, they deserve better from this Government.

I am also concerned about the lack of community disaster awareness and education activities that have been conducted by the Department. In the 2000/2001 Budget the Government budgeted to run between 40 and 50 activities, yet only ran 16. Surely we want the community as well versed as possible to cope with any situation. These are the sorts of activities that need to be encouraged and run in the community.

I must also express complete disbelief with the low percentage of hospitals that have been inspected for fire safety at only 45% and only 70% in nursing homes and aged care facilities. This figure should be 100% fire investigation and 100% for fire safety. It should not take a disaster like the Childers' Backpacker fire in one of our hospitals to ensure that fire safety in hospitals, nursing homes and aged care facilities are up to standard. We are talking here of facilities full of people who are, in the main, incapable of being moved quickly in the event of a fire. Why then isn't the Government ensuring that these facilities are up to the mark in fire safety?

With 68% of pensioner or benefit recipients having difficulty finding affordable housing in Queensland and with the closure of caravan parks and some boarding houses, lack of affordable housing is contributing to the number of homelessness in Queensland. I would have thought that the Beattie Government would be increasing the amount of money being budgeted for Community Housing, by a lot more than only the budgeted \$2 million. From the figures supplied by in the Minister's Budget paper, he obviously does not think the need for crisis accommodation or transitional accommodation is going to increase on last year and that the number of people requiring long term accommodation is going to increase by only an extra 9 people. I wish I had his confidence. This is a slight on those people requiring crisis housing in Queensland and I think the Government should be condemned for their callousness.

