



Speech by

TREVOR STRONG

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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BUDGET DEBATE 2001

Mr STRONG (Burnett—ALP) (9.30 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of the Beattie government's budget—a budget which is for the benefit of Queensland as a whole. I would like to inform fellow members of the significant difference this budget will achieve for the good of the small but rapidly growing community of Agnes Water. The region of Agnes Water and 1770 has a population of approximately 3,000 residents and a staggering growth rate of around 15 per cent, which is one of the highest growth rates in this state. Strong growth rates, I will admit, are not uncommon, especially in the south-east corner, but I do not think there is a situation like this elsewhere that combines both isolation and growth.

When the Beattie government came to power, the only road access to Agnes and 1770 was, and still is, the Roundhill Road—a 50-kilometre journey through some of the best cattle country in the state but a 50-kilometre journey on one of the busiest—if not, the busiest—gravel roads in the state.

The Miriam Vale Shire Council is doing a marvellous job maintaining its road network considering the task it is up against. Being a coastal road, it suffers from frequent heavy rain events, which take a heavy toll on unsealed roads. As many members of rural electorates would understand, add to that the growing heavy vehicle traffic and you get a very difficult situation for council engineers in keeping the corrugations out of the roadway, which in some respects has hindered the development of the region and also the delivery of government services. The sum of \$470,000 has been provided by this government's budget to seal the last 2.5 kilometres of this journey—to finally close the book on Roundhill Road. This will not only bring relief to the locals who may commute, but it will also boost the local tourist industry, which has been desperately in need of this infrastructure for some time.

Being an isolated community, the Agnes region has, for a long time, struggled with medical service delivery. Whether it be the isolation factor or the population levels of varying demographics, it has been a serious problem for some time. The construction of an ambulance station a few years ago, with the enlistment of an excellent crew of officers with a fully qualified paramedic, has alleviated some of the fears of the local people concerning medical services. Again, the Beattie government has shown it listens to the electorate, understands their concerns and recognises their needs.

I am pleased for the people of Agnes, with the announcement by the Minister for Health that \$600,000 will be used to facilitate the construction of a primary health care centre at Agnes Water—the benefits of which will be hard to calculate. It will offer the community a high standard of medical service that is much needed and well deserved. It will also give a high level of permanency to the medical profession where it is absolutely necessary to carry out their practice and offer their patients the best possible service.

Taking into account the improvements to the quality of the ambulance service and the much-needed investment in the health care centre, another facility which plays an important part in the total health care of the region, the Energex helicopter rescue service, will receive from the Minister for Emergency Services—and to his credit he is in the chamber today—an allocation of \$450,000 per annum. The new helicopter will be bigger, and it can fly faster and travel for longer distances, therefore completing the whole package of health service delivery for my region and beyond.

Provision for the accommodation of the local police officer at Agnes, plus funding for the construction of a new police station, which will encompass provision for an extra officer, will be

welcomed with open arms. The officers who are there now do a fine job considering the conditions they work with—for example, the trebling of the town's population during peak holiday periods, high unemployment in this large rural area, and a long drive to the nearest watch-house. The provision of the new police station and an extra police officer will be a major benefit for the community.

The announcement that there will be an investment of infrastructure in the local school in the form of a small amenities block of \$105,000 is, to say the least, the icing on the cake for residents of Agnes Water and surrounding districts, who have experienced hardships over the last 10 years.

The best news for my electorate is the level of capital works being invested not only in Agnes, which desperately needs it, but also in the Coral Coast. In this budget, \$100,000 out of a future \$1.5 million has been allocated for the construction of a combined ambulance and fire and rescue headquarters west of Bargara—again provided by my colleague the Minister for Emergency Services. The continued growth in the areas of Burnett Heads, Coral Cove and Innes Park has brought both services to the realisation that current service capacities will not adequately cater for the future.

I was fortunate to represent the Minister for Emergency Services at the launching of the trial for a new ambulance station at a new location with enhanced personnel. The trial immediately showed great success with quicker response times and better service. The trial has a little way to go, but this investment will bring greater service to the Coral Coast in both fire and rescue and ambulance services. It will also provide an extra six or seven full-time jobs.

The construction of a TAFE marine centre at the new port precinct at a cost of three-quarters of a million dollars is great news for the Burnett Heads area, providing a much-needed boost to the local construction industry, which is struggling under the burden of the GST. As well as the construction work, it will provide a much-needed flow-on effect to local accommodation providers, hotels and eateries, shopkeepers and other service businesses.

Other construction work given the go-ahead includes a two-space relocatable building for the Woongarra State School at a cost of \$168,000 and a public housing capital works program in the Burnett electorate at a cost of \$287,000—provided by the Minister for Public Works, who is also in the chamber. These projects will provide continuity of work for Q-Build tradesmen and especially young apprentices. It is the apprentices of today who will keep the building industry going tomorrow. The flow-on effects to local suppliers from these projects are also badly needed to help bring the building industry out of the doldrums.

The Isis district will also benefit greatly from the budget, with the Minister for Transport and Minister for Main Roads having announced an allocation of \$1 million to help the Isis council widen the Isis Highway at Logging Creek, as well as upgrading Farnsfield Road. These works programs for the Isis will provide extra paid work for the council and maintain a level of continuity for its permanent staff. It relieves some of the burden from the council to fund these projects now, rather than falling behind.

In summary, I am pleased to see the Beattie government's budget doing the things it has to do—and doing them well—with good increases for the important areas, while keeping our state of Queensland in great shape and setting it up well for the future.
