



Speech by

Miss FIONA SIMPSON

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard 21 June 2002

BUDGET SPEECH 2002

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (10.30 a.m.): I rise to speak in the budget debate. I will firstly address the total inadequacy of the state budget in regard to health spending. I will then turn to address other issues such as tourism and my electorate of Maroochydore.

In terms of health, this budget is a flatliner. It has failed in terms of providing adequate funding for Health staffing increases in Queensland. It is no wonder that we have seen nurses, doctors and allied health professionals speaking out about their frustration. The level of strike action that we have seen this week has been unprecedented. It speaks volumes about the frustration of everyday health workers, nurses and other allied Health staff who are on the front line and dealing with patients. There has been only a 0.7 per cent increase in this budget for funding for extra staff. That shows the absolute disregard of this government for putting funds into priority areas—in this case, the front line of health care.

The state government boasts about a 6.7 per cent increase in health spending, but the funding increase for additional staff falls far short. Last year there was only a 0.3 per cent increase. This year sees a 0.7 per cent increase. They are minuscule amounts. Nurses and other health staff are frustrated by the government's failure to listen. Where is the Health Minister when the action is occurring? She leaves early for an interstate conference!

I turn to consider the reaction around the state to the budget. Usually there is a post-budget honeymoon period for the government. But Mr Beattie is not enjoying that luxury, particularly in the health arena. Two days after the budget was handed down, 10,000 Queensland nurses from 80 hospitals went on a 24-hour strike. As a result of the industrial action, Brisbane's Princess Alexandra Hospital had to cancel at least 800 outpatient appointments. It cancelled non-urgent medical procedures, limited considerably elective surgery and cancelled all non-emergency surgery. This was repeated around countless hospitals throughout the state.

The Beattie government's health budget is merely a token effort. I do not see workers within Queensland Health suddenly breathing a sigh of relief; in fact, entirely the opposite. I can safely say that we currently have the most unpopular Health Minister in Queensland's history. Where is Wendy? She is in the Northern Territory at a conference! I have since learned from Amanda Vanstone's office that Mrs Edmond did not need to attend that conference. She could have sent a senior official in her place and it would not have been a problem. Mrs Edmond did not even have to leave at all yesterday because the conference did not start until today. Mrs Edmond told Channel 7 news last night from the Northern Territory that she was as close there to the nursing situation as she would be if she was in Brisbane. I suppose that is true, because she is useless in Brisbane, too! There is no discernible difference whether she is at work in Brisbane or not. It is time that the minister paid attention to the portfolio, but more importantly, it is time that the Premier dealt with this issue and appointed someone with more competence to this very important portfolio. The people who are paying the price for the minister's incompetence are the health professionals on the front line and, most of all, the patients who need access to a functioning health system.

It is a shame that the Beattie government has had to let the health system crumble even more through this menial funding contribution. This is a result of its financial failures, which are illustrated by the \$883 million budget deficit. The government has failed the health system in other ways. It has failed to meet many targets. In this financial year, it appointed only half of the promised 500 radiation officers.

This is an area in which the government has been criticised previously for falling far short in terms of staffing levels. Only 236 positions were approved. The government also fell well short of the targeted number of women screened for breast cancer—4,000 missed out. Standards in other services are also declining because of a lack of proper administration by this government. Home and Community Care service reviews were ignored by the Beattie government over the year 2001-02, with only 88 out of 200 being undertaken. We have seen a failure in the administration of this government; a failure to manage the books and deliver financial security for health services and a range of other services in Queensland.

As I said, the Beattie government has increased the funding for full-time equivalent staffing levels by a measly 0.7 per cent. That is after a feeble 0.3 per cent increase in last year's budget. Consequently, there are now fewer nurses working in Queensland Health compared with the Queensland population rate of increase. Considering that doctors and nurses are already struggling to make up the required numbers, I can only imagine that the position will get much worse, particularly after the recent announcement of an 8.5 per cent population increase in Queensland.

This Health Minister has failed to meet key targets. In all areas of emergency treatment—except category 5, which relates to treatment within two hours—the proportion of patients treated within standard time frames was below the target percentages. So in terms of emergency treatment, the minister has fallen far short of meeting important targets to treat people. Once again, that is a result of the funding crisis and the lack of staff at the coalface of health care.

Only 90 per cent of the targeted 95 per cent of elective surgery patients received treatment within the specified time frame of 90 days. The real story behind that statistic is the unpublished outpatient waiting lists and the fact that there is a waiting list to get on a waiting list to see a specialist to have an outpatient appointment before a patient even makes the surgery list. The Health Minister promised several years ago to make those details public so that there was full accountability, yet we have never seen those details. That is an absolute disgrace.

Mental health spending per capita has decreased in the 2002-03 budget by 0.2 per cent. There has been a 0.2 per cent fall-off in mental health spending per head of population in this state. Given the fact that the incidence of people suffering from acute mental health problems and other mental health problems is one of the most concerning trends in public health, it is a disgrace that this key priority has been let down by the Beattie government.

In health maintenance services this government has decreased per capita spending by two per cent and there has been an overall real per capita increase of only two per cent. The figures speak for themselves. There is a failure to address some of those key service areas. Throughout the regions of this state—certainly on the Sunshine Coast and certainly on the Gold Coast, where the government has done a secret deal over the collapse of the Robina Hospital—there is a real concern about the fact that there has been a lack of addressing the real funding needs to ensure that nurses, doctors and other allied health staff will be in place to do these jobs.

I have mentioned before in this House the concerns facing other key hospitals, such as Townsville. The desperation that health workers and nurses are experiencing these days in key hospitals like Townsville is reaching an alarming point, and the fact that those professionals walked out in protest yesterday highlights this fact. Even though the Townsville Hospital has a new hospital building, there has been an inadequacy in dealing with the key areas of service delivery. This north Queensland hospital is supposed to be a tertiary level hospital supplying tertiary level services, but there is still an attitude in Queensland Health and by this Health Minister to fly people south to the south-east corner rather than putting in the infrastructure that should be available in a tertiary base hospital. Staff in that hospital are being expected to carry out high levels of service but are not being funded at that level of service. That is causing an incredible strain and having an incredible impact upon the patients who are awaiting access to services.

This story is repeated right throughout Queensland. For instance, there is talk that the Maryborough Base Hospital will not deliver babies at all anymore. The Premier stood up at public meetings in Maryborough and in this parliament and promised that services would not be reduced in relation to that hospital. He promised that services would not be reduced, but this government has allowed it to get to a situation where it has not put the staff in place with adequate support to ensure that they in fact are able to continue to deliver babies at Maryborough Base Hospital. One really has to question whether this government is trying to penny pinch by allowing these services to run down, and the people who are really losing are those who do not get access to such services. More and more people are failing to get access to basic health care that should be available through public sector health in this state.

I turn now to tourism and the Sunshine Coast electorate. This issue is highlighted by the government's amazing inaction on HMAS *Brisbane*, which was meant to be a gift from the federal government with a \$3 million grant attached to it to allow for the sinking of this grand old warship and used instead as an artificial reef—a fish habitat and also a recreational facility for divers. This would have meant a tremendous boost to tourism on the Sunshine Coast and it would have had a

tremendous potential to create jobs. What has Mr Beattie done? In this parliament the other day he did a dummy spit. Because he did not get his photo in the paper when they announced the \$3 million gift he came into this parliament and did a dummy spit. He has made it as difficult as he possibly can to get this project up and running on the Sunshine Coast.

Mr Cummins: Who will pay the insurance—ratepayers?

Miss SIMPSON: I thank the member for Kawana for mentioning insurance, because I have talked to the organisers of this project. It is interesting to note that they have never had a dialogue with the Premier about insurance being a problem. It seems to be—

Government members interjected.

Miss SIMPSON: I do not have a voice because I have a sore throat.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Fouras): Order! I am sorry, but I had been diverted. The member for Maroochydore has a sore throat. She cannot speak above interjections and I ask members to take that into account and to cease interjecting.

Miss SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. All the state government needs to do is sign off on this project. The project organisers are terrific people who have got in and done the hard yards, but they were stunned to hear the Premier's statement the other day. They do not believe that the indemnity issue is in fact a stumbling block to it. That is something that the Premier seems to have come up with in order to put the focus back on him rather than realising that we are at risk of losing this project interstate because the Queensland government has been mucking around on it. I am amazed. The Sunshine Coast has already lost out with regard to major infrastructure. There are a lot of very angry people on the Sunshine Coast. The area has a number of Labor members and there was a lot of talk that they were going to deliver a boost in capital spending, yet the other day the Premier got up here in the parliament and, through his dummy spit, threatened to send off course a very important infrastructure gift from the federal government to the Sunshine Coast—in this case, for the tourism industry—and that is most unfortunate. He needs to get over his ego problem, get on board and not pour cold water on what is a great project, because the Sunshine Coast needs this because it will create jobs.

I turn now to infrastructure in relation to roads. The Sunshine Coast is one of the fastest growing regions in Queensland, yet the majority of the announcements in the budget were for federally funded roads. There was a reannouncement of the Kawana Road, but the state is actually legally obliged to go ahead with that because of its contracts with developers. It is a road that is needed, but that is really a drop in the bucket. We need to see real roads and infrastructure development on the Sunshine Coast. I have mentioned before that the Sunshine Motorway is an example of this, as is other roads such as the Maroochydore Road upgrade and David Low Way. We have seen a languishing with regard to the Pacific Paradise road network study. It was announced by Vaughan Johnson when he was the Minister for Transport. As members would realise, that was more than four years ago yet that study has still not been finished under this Transport Minister. They drag the studies out for as long as possible and then one has to go and fight for the funds for the recommendations of those planning studies. That is outrageous! That community needs that road infrastructure now. It has taken more than four years and the planning study has still not been finished. That is just an example of the way this government does business.

There are other needs on the Sunshine Coast. We have an unemployment rate that is four per cent or five per cent above the state average. The state government announces some nice little job programs, but it is not talking about real infrastructure that creates ongoing jobs within the private sector and which in turn generates wealth for the greater community for average mums and dads—mums and dads who are currently waiting to get a job. Community conferencing is something that I have been lobbying for. I am pleased that other state members have come on board with regard to that issue. I met with police, family services and key youth sector people last year and they identified that this was an issue they have had trouble getting funding for.

I raised that in the parliament in April and wrote to the Family Services Minister. Since then, as I said, I am very pleased that there has been support across political parties for this initiative. It is about breaking the juvenile justice crime cycle. It is about trying to nip in the bud young people who have committed offences and bring them in contact with their victim where the victim so chooses so that there is a real awareness of the impact of their crime, because the victim has the opportunity to put their case. Where it has been appropriately used and supported it has been shown to be very effective to alter the course of not just current juvenile offenders but juvenile offenders who have the potential to grow into bigger criminals.

While talking about crime issues, the Sunshine Coast has a desperate need for new police stations. The current situation is that the water police are not even based on the water. They are based at Kawana Police Station. It is time that the water police were based on the water at Mooloolaba. There is a need to look at redeveloping the Queensland Transport and Main Roads facility on the Spit at

Mooloolaba into a multipurpose water based facility with the water police based there as well. It is desperately needed, as is their need for more staff. I acknowledge that there have been increases in water police numbers, but there is also a need for an increase in the boating and fisheries officers numbers. They are enforcing a lot of the regulations and there has been a lot of frustration because of the increased number of people using our waterways in south-east Queensland. One figure I heard was that the number of registered craft and people using the waterways by the year 2015 would double, a tremendous impact upon our waterways. But we certainly have not seen the officers who are able to enforce those regulations and who are funded to do that job.

I mentioned police stations. The other police station to which I refer is one on the north shore at Coolumb. This government says, 'Trust us, it will be in future budgets.' I would like to see more than just vague assurances. Give us a deadline, give us a date. Get out there, buy the land. The land is disappearing; it is a high growth area. It is time the government sold the existing police station at Coolumb and put it in a central location with good road access to service the needs of the Maroochy north shore. But the continuing issue of real numbers of police on the beat is one that the community also raises with me constantly. We have not seen a corresponding increase in the number of police officers and other key services with the population growth. This is of great concern, because we love the Sunshine Coast. We want to keep it beautiful. It is also a great tourism destination.