



Speech by

HOWARD HOBBS

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

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APPROPRIATION BILL [No. 2]

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Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (4.19 p.m.): I am pleased to rise to speak to the appropriation debate today. A lot has been said in relation to government debt, particularly by the Opposition Leader. I do not want to go over it all again, but the point is that there are some great concerns out there in relation to where the budget is going. That concern is not coming just from our side of politics; it is across the board. There are serious concerns in relation to whether the funds of this state are being managed well. In light of how many deficits we have had—there are more to come—it is quite a scary situation. That is particularly the case with the capital works budget being cut. I understand that when there are some troubles with finances capital works have to be cut back. So we understand why it has happened, but funding really is a matter of priorities.

An issue that is very important particularly out in my region is exceptional circumstances funding. Insufficient funding has been provided to the Department of Primary Industries to effect reforms to the exceptional circumstances arrangements agreed to by the Commonwealth and state ministers. As members would be aware, the ministers have met and have thrashed out a much better system for approving drought exceptional circumstances assistance. That has taken quite a long time to achieve. The only hold-up in relation to these reforms now is funding from the state. The process has been streamlined with quicker applications and the ability to expand those regions when necessary, rather than having to go back through the whole bureaucratic process of making a second application for the same region plus a bit more. The delay boils down to the state not providing the funding.

The Commonwealth government presently supplies 100 per cent of welfare support, but business support is provided on the basis of 10 per cent from the state and 90 per cent from the Commonwealth. It is proposed to change that ratio to fifty-fifty. Therefore, the state will be an equal player in this particular game. And from what we could see it has basically been a game for the Minister for Primary Industries. It seems that even though the Minister for Primary Industries is on the group that set the guidelines, he is quite happy to play politics and blame the federal government when an application for exceptional circumstances assistance is being held up. Under these reforms, at least everybody is brought together to make a collective decision. If they are paying equal amounts, then they also share equally the praise or the blame when the time comes. I think this a very serious situation. It is a stalemate, but a resolution needs to be found fairly quickly.

Another important issue is the airconditioning of schools. This is particularly important in many areas of the state. A lot of schools in my area do not have airconditioning. Even though we are in the same zone for which airconditioning is available on a four to one funding basis, I believe that schools in my area are being discriminated against. An example of this is St George Primary School. For a long time it has been raising money to aircondition the school. There is an e-petition online at present. Airconditioning the school will cost about \$300,000. Normally under the government scheme if the school raises \$75,000, under a four to one arrangement it can get airconditioning. The school has already raised \$130,000. It will keep \$30,000 up its sleeve for the next round, but of the \$100,000 it will spend it will be able to aircondition only one-third of the school. So the school has to go out and raise not only the \$75,000 that the schools in the north raise; it has to raise close to another \$100,000 to even meet the criteria. That school is really coping it in the neck. I do not think it is fair and the parents out there do not think it is fair. I do not see why we cannot have a better system for the airconditioning of those schools.

I am disappointed that the Treasurer is not present in the chamber to hear me quote his comments. I did not trawl for this; it happened to fall on my desk. It is a speech in the Address in Reply debate from 20 April 1978. Mr Mackenroth said—

This is the first opportunity I have had to put forward some of my views on how I feel a Government can help the community in which we live.

One important way a Government could help our community would be by proper protection of school p. and c. organisations. At the present time schools are forced to raise money for many necessary items of education such as special textbooks, television sets, musical equipment and playground equipment. The list is endless.

He is dead right. The list is endless. When some schools have to raise twice or three times as much as schools in the north to get the same sort of equality in education, I think there is something wrong with the system.

The other issue I raise is the general underfunding of many of the departments, particularly in relation to staffing. Today we had a bit of a discussion about planning. That brought home to me just how underfunded that area is. One of the most important strategic planning issues faced in the whole of south-east Queensland relates to traffic flows, integrated transport and South East Queensland 2020. Unless we can plan ahead to make sure the roads are in the right places, the railways are in the right places, the population is in the right places and so on, there will be serious livability problems in years to come.

There is a most important planning arrangement in place, but there are no staff left to run it. For one of the most important facets of our whole life there are about 10 people in the Department of Local Government who are trying their best to pull it together, and they just cannot do it. We really need to plan ahead to ensure that Queensland continues to be a great place to live. One only has to drive along the highways to see the traffic jams that are happening again. This mirrors experiences overseas. Some cities decide not to build more highways because as soon as they build them they are filled up within two, three or four years. They are trying to find alternatives.

We have the opportunity now, while we are still developing, to put planning regimes in place. It certainly will not happen unless we are able to sufficiently fund planning. Somebody said to me today that it is a bit like trying to take off in a Hercules plane with a tiger moth motor. It just will not fly. I say to the Treasurer: it is important in the next budget that the government recognises, particularly in the planning field—it is one the minister would be very well aware of from his time overseeing local government—that we need to provide sufficient funding.

I am sure there are many other departments that want more funding. We see time and time again that government services just are not being delivered. We are seeing cutbacks particularly in a lot of the rural service areas, for example DPI and DNR. People cannot get applications through. Nothing is happening. Everything is bogged down. I do not doubt that every department is experiencing similar problems, but I think the issue in relation to planning in south-east Queensland is important. I request that the Treasurer look very carefully at funding that properly in the future.