



Speech by

JAN JARRATT

MEMBER FOR WHITSUNDAY

Hansard 20 June 2002

BUDGET SPEECH 2002

Ms JARRATT (Whitsunday—ALP) (4.39 p.m.): It is a pleasure to rise to speak in support of the appropriation bills for the 2002-03 Queensland budget. I congratulate the Treasurer on again delivering a great budget—a fair budget—against the background of a nervous global financial situation in the wake of the events of 11 September last year. I have to agree with *Courier-Mail* commentator Matthew Franklin who stated that this is a budget from the heart. This budget is, above all, a win for Queensland families who are, after all, the very backbone of our society.

As a former teacher I welcome the funding pledges to education that will see more than \$158 million spent over the next four years to fulfil our education and training reform commitments. We have moved irrevocably into the information age and while many of us still struggle to come to terms with the explosion in communication technologies, we do not want to sentence the next generation to a situation equivalent to fighting with one hand tied behind one's back. We must, and this budget does, make a strong commitment to ensuring that all Queenslanders have access to the type of education that prepares them to work and compete in the technological age.

The budget also includes \$60 million to support students with disabilities and funding to employ extra teachers over and beyond that required for normal growth. These are two very significant initiatives as together they seek to address the issues of specialist service delivery and student-teacher ratios. While I acknowledge that teaching will remain a challenging career choice, these two initiatives go to the core of addressing existing impediments to the achievement of sound educational outcomes and professional satisfaction. I commend the Minister for Education for her vision and tenacity in what is a complex but crucial portfolio.

Parents, students and teachers in the electorate of Whitsunday are set to reap benefits from other education funding provisions in the budget. Most notably, the budget provides \$1.54 million to complete the purchase of land for a proposed new high school in the northern beaches of Mackay. I am delighted that this funding has been provided as it honours an election commitment. I look forward to being part of an extensive consultation process with the community that aims to examine time frames for the development of the school itself.

Further north, Cannonvale State School is set for a major makeover, thanks to the provision of \$1.4 million targeted for the construction of new classrooms, a covered area, oval works and amenities. I know that the school Principal, Pam Graham, and her dedicated staff and the entire school community have been eagerly awaiting these improvements as the school is located in an area of rapid growth that has seen existing facilities struggle to cater for the growing need. Together with other schools in the electorate of Whitsunday, Cannonvale State School has been allocated a total of \$1.6 million in the government's Cooler Schools program. This will see Proserpine State School, Proserpine State High School, Cannonvale State School and Bowen State School receive eagerly awaited funds to complete airconditioning projects in this financial year.

Another area of importance not only to the people of my electorate but indeed to every Queenslanders is that of law and order. I want to congratulate the Treasurer and also the Minister for Police and Corrective Services on their continued commitment, as demonstrated in this budget, to ensuring that our police service is the best in Australia. I note with satisfaction that the police force is set to receive a 6.8 per cent boost this financial year. That means not only more police on the beat but a real commitment to ensuring that our communities are safe and secure.

I am positively delighted that money has been allocated in this budget to progress our election commitment of a new 24-hour police station in the northern beaches of Mackay. Residents in the suburbs of Shoal Point, Bucasia, Eimeo, Black's Beach, Dolphin Heads and Rural View have been telling me how important a police presence is to their sense of security. While we fortunately do not have high levels of serious crime in these areas, a continuous police presence will assist to deter would-be petty offenders so that the risk of theft, assault and vandalism is kept to an absolute minimum.

I am also pleased to see funding available to progress the marine police base at Abel Point Marina in the Whitsundays. Our water police do a fantastic job and the new facility will make their operations even more efficient than they are already. In addition, the budget allocates funding that will see the establishment of a tactical crime squad in the Mackay-Whitsunday region that will be serviced by seven officers. This welcome addition to local law enforcement services is set to commence work in July of this year. This group will target crime hot spots and drug offenders and together with existing police services will help to ensure that law-abiding citizens will be safer and more secure than ever.

In an electorate such as Whitsunday, often our sense of security also comes from knowing that there is a large army of volunteers out there trained and ready to respond to unforeseen emergencies. In particular, I want to draw attention to our wonderful volunteers who make up the Rural Fire Service and the State Emergency Service, better known as the SES. I am delighted to see that nearly \$19 million has been earmarked over the next four years for a volunteer support package to target these groups. The package will involve the provision of training, protective clothing and equipment, communication equipment and the purchase of new vehicles and vessels to assist these groups in the important and often dangerous work that they do. I look forward to seeing a more detailed breakdown of this funding so that I can assess the impact it will have on the groups within my electorate.

It is also fantastic to see that our local Mackay based emergency helicopter rescue service will share in an additional \$15.6 million over the next four years. Our CQ rescue helicopter staff do a great job in responding to a vast range of medical and emergency situations across the region. In particular, the service provided for the islands in the Whitsunday group is second to none. Many lives have doubtless been saved due to the rescue helicopter's ability to respond quickly to the call for assistance. Therefore, I am very pleased that this budget continues our tradition of support for this service. In light of the time, I seek leave to incorporate the remainder of my speech in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

I am equally pleased that this Budget provides funds to provide improve fire and ambulance services across the electorate. Not only will Mackay's Northern Beaches residents benefit from a new 24-hour police station, they can also look forward to improved responses for both fire and ambulance services. \$420 000 has been provided in the Budget to buy land and commence construction of a new joint Emergency Service Centre in North Mackay. I have lobbied the Minister hard to secure these facilities and I am just delighted that I can now share this great news with the people of the Northern Beaches.

A new ambulance station for Calen will also become a reality with the Budget announcement of the first of two instalments of \$200 000 dedicated to the construction of this facility. I would also like to complement the Minister for Emergency services at this point on his commitment to ensuring that regional ambulance officers have access to state of the art vehicles for emergency response situations. In March of this year the Bowen ambulance service took possession of a new Mercedes Sprinter ambulance which was a wonderful addition to their vehicle fleet ensuring that anyone unfortunate enough to need emergency care will certainly receive swift attention and expert care.

Mr Speaker, the last twelve months have been particularly difficult for many in my electorate as the combined impact of September 11 and the collapse of Ansett left the thriving local tourism industry reeling and wondering what the future might hold. At that time this Government acted decisively to support the industry through a well targeted advertising campaign that saw our drive-tourism market grow significantly. We have slowly begun to claw our way back to pre-September 11 circumstances as Qantas and Virgin Airlines have moved to fill much of the gap left by the sudden departure of Ansett, but the industry needs continued support.

One of the brightest lights on the tourism horizon has proved to be the convention and events market that has been ably supported in the Whitsundays by the local conventions bureau. I am very pleased to see that convention bureaus across the state have received continued funding as there was some fear that this funding might cease this year.

Of course the other major cause for concern in my electorate revolves around the crisis in the sugar industry. Massive sugar production in Brazil combined with low prices, unfavourable weather conditions over the past three years and the invasion of crops by orange rust have all combined to bring the industry to all but its knees. I have enormous sympathy for growers, industry workers and their families as they grapple with an uncertain future. I attended industry meetings and listened to industry leaders and individuals in the industry and the message was basically the same—we need help to ensure that we are still around in 2003. There is no easy or glib answer to the problems facing the sugar industry and all levels of government will need to work together to provide assistance, but I am very pleased that the Beattie Government has been able to respond in this Budget to provide \$20 million in short term relief by way of low interest loans to assist with the planting and fertilising of the 2003 crop which must be in the ground in the coming weeks.

This is not the whole answer but it is a great beginning and I look forward to continuing to work with members of the industry in an effort to ensure that we continue to have a viable and profitable sugar industry in Whitsunday.

Mr Speaker, there is much more to recommend in this Budget. In particular I have nothing but praise for the commitment made to families and children through the provision of a further \$188 million over four years through the Department of Families. This is where the real HEART of this Budget lies. I look forward to witnessing the new hope given to children, foster carers and families through the roll out of initiatives associated with this major announcement.

Mr Speaker, this Budget makes me proud to be part of the Beattie Labor team and I congratulate the Treasurer for aspiring to and achieving a great Budget for families and a great Budget for all Queenslanders. I commend the Bill to the House.