



Speech by

**HOWARD HOBBS**

**MEMBER FOR WARREGO**

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#### **STATE BUDGET 2003-04**

**Mr HOBBS** (Warrego—NPA) (9.40 p.m.): This is an opportunity for all members of parliament to express an opinion on the budget and its impact on their electorate. It is very important that we are able to do that because the budget is a document that should reflect the needs of a very wide variety of people across the whole of the state. It is interesting to compare notes and listen to some of the comments that have been made today in relation to the budget's impacts on electorates across Queensland.

I have noticed that a lot of the government members have been talking about what a great Labor budget it is. I was asking myself what that meant. What does a good Labor budget mean? I am quite sincere about it. Does it mean that the government is putting a budget together for Labor people? Is it putting a budget together for all of Queensland or is it putting a budget together just for a select few people?

**Mr Lawlor:** The focus is on health and education.

**Mr HOBBS:** The member is saying that the emphasis is on health and education. Why would that not be a budget for any government? Surely health and education are important; no matter what government is in power they would be very, very important.

The Premier had said that we were going to have a five per cent unemployment rate, but now it is predicted for 2003-04 to be seven per cent when six per cent is the Australian average—and Victoria has 5.75 percent. We know that Queensland always has a higher unemployment rate, and we accept that. We have growth and the like so I do not think there is anything particularly spectacular about that. It is a Labor budget. We have also had three deficits in a row. Is it a great Labor budget because we have had three deficits in a row? We have not experienced that for probably 25 or 30 years. I am not sure whether we have ever had three deficits in a row. \$2.1 billion—is that what the government members mean when they say it is a Labor budget? I am honestly trying to come to grips with what they really mean by 'a great Labor budget'. Are they spending everything and receiving anything? They have also talked about having a 7.5 per cent return on investments. Today the return is minus three per cent, yet they are budgeting for a 7.5 per cent return next year. Is that a Labor budget?

I fail to understand the criteria by which the government is working to come to a good, strong financial position. It is great to have a welfare society, but a capitalist society has to pay for it in a lot of ways. The two have to be matched to make sure both can be done. We have to be able to provide the hospitals, the education and the resources for people—we have to be able to help people to manage when things are tough—but we also have to have a society, a government, a country and a state that can afford to pay it.

Much was made of the Police budget, for instance, which has reached \$1 billion. That is great—that is fantastic—but it has to be that much because of the growth. It has to reach that level. It is expected. If it did not reach a billion dollars we would ask what the hell was going on. There is nothing flash about that. We are happy about the fact that the government has reached that level, but it is not anything to write home about. I cannot find anything in this budget that is exceptional. There are the normal good things that we have to have, but I do not see anything that is really outstanding or earth shattering. It is a normal working type budget to keep the show going, which is good and which we have to have. But there is nothing spectacular that is going to push Queensland into the next century.

As I mentioned previously, the important thing is what the budget provides in relation to our own electorates. This is supposed to be a true Labor government providing for all of Queensland, yet there are still people out in western Queensland who cannot get airconditioning in their schools. Subsidisation of airconditioning of schools on the coastal strip is provided, but people living in western Queensland—and there are Labor voters out there as well—cannot get it. There is something not quite square with this whole system. That is disappointing.

There is no Cooler Schools program for Maranoa on the Western Downs, for instance. I have even put in place an e-petition to bring to the attention of the government that airconditioning in those schools is important. We are happy to take our place and stand in line, but if we are not going to even be considered then it starts to wear a bit thin. I think it is a bit unreasonable if the government is not prepared to share that around. It appears that a good Labor budget might in fact be one that selectively puts the money where it wishes to.

Another area in which the budget is sadly lacking is that of special learning areas. One school in my electorate has very high special needs. It certainly needs some additional assistance, which so far has not really come forward. We like to see some assistance there. I have already made representations in relation to this particular issue, but it needs a bit of attention by the government.

I welcomed the increased funding for plant and animal disease programs to protect Queensland's primary industries against exotic pest and disease. However, the government should not forget that other destructive pests have come in. Recently I tabled in the parliament a paper on army worms. It is one example of what happens. Something like that comes along all the time. The Department of Primary Industries in particular has not been funded adequately to manage these types of outbreaks. We need to have additional ongoing funding to be able to manage the problem. The department should be able to say within a few days, 'This is the problem. This is the chemical you can use. This is the withholding period and this is the way to go.' It is not there. There is loss of production and in some instances people will go broke because these pests have come in and have cleaned the country out and they will have no grass for the winter. On top of the drought they have already endured, those people will face a very severe time indeed.

I have called for a contingency fund or something similar to assist in the purchase of chemicals to eradicate and control army worms and for their management on state owned lands. These pests can virtually go wild on stock routes and in national parks, conservation lands and a lot of other state owned lands. They can eat land-holders out of house and home.

There is no commitment from the DPI to the ADP program—the Australian Development Program—for the Western Downs Solution Group. This group was able to apply for funding from the Commonwealth government and received about \$3 million to actually try to improve its performance in its own areas—to value add, to improve the community in the Western Downs. It has not been able to get the state government to put in its contribution for 50 per cent to make it fly. That is very disappointing, because there is so much that can be done. People do not want handouts. They want to be self-reliant. They can be, and this is one way of doing it. For a very small sum of money, they can basically start this program. So far the state government has put in about \$25,000 out of \$175,000 for a social economic study. That of course is welcome, but more money is needed at the end of the day to do the job properly and to put some runs on the board. It will save the government money in the end, because these people will be viable and there will be programs put in place for those that are not viable to either move out or whatever the case may be. Sometimes people cannot see the wood for the trees. Anyway, that is the way it is.

I also want to thank the Minister for Primary Industries for ensuring that the funding shortfall for the community rural finance counselling service was restored. Somewhere down the track the department had failed to pay those five groups about \$3,000 a year. I asked a question in the House and the minister was able to fix it up, and I express my appreciation on behalf of those people because they provide a very important service. There is not enough recognition that the drought is not over. There seems to be a misconception that the situation is not too bad, but producers are facing serious problems, even financially.

While Australia has been very much isolated from the economic woes of the Western World in this last year or so, we will have to face some tough times in the future. There need to be mechanisms in place to ensure that we are able to survive that. I do not think that there has been a fair share put in by the state government. The Commonwealth government, quite frankly, in this case has put in an extraordinary amount of money and the state government is nowhere near matching it, even in the very low percentage it has at the present moment. So this government is dragging the chain there, and that is disappointing. I am sure that most people in rural industry are aware of that.

Exceptional circumstances applications are still slow in coming through. The Department of Primary Industries is relying on Agforce to put those applications together. Those applications are expensive to do. I would suspect that it has cost Agforce more than it is getting paid. It is getting paid about \$2,000 per application, and I would not think that that would even pay its travelling expenses,

quite frankly. In every other state in Australia the DPI equivalent do the applications with input from primary industry groups. In Queensland it is a bit different. It is a case of do it yourself or not get it. That is important.

Transport is another area that is very important in the Warrego electorate, which is about the same size as the state of Victoria and consists of the whole south-west of Queensland to the South Australian border. We want the roads upgraded to 110 kilometres an hour. There are many roads that can be increased to that speed. We know there is a national standard that has to be met in relation to making the speed limit on roads 110 kilometres an hour. I do not really believe that we are doing that in Queensland. There are roads, certainly in my area, that would meet that standard but they are not being upgraded to 110 kilometres an hour. There needs to be a review of that process to ensure that we can get that upgrade as soon as possible.

In terms of country racing, it has been an absolute disaster. The worst possible outcome one could possibly dream of has occurred to country racing. The minister has said previously that she is going to phase out of it and everything else. Why have a minister when there is no representation? There is nothing at all happening. The government has cut itself loose. It is getting \$1 billion over 15 years coming in from the TAB or UniTAB.

**Mr Lawlor:** That's what the industry wanted.

**Mr HOBBS:** Irrespective of that, you have had five years to fix that.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Poole): Order! The member will direct his comments through the chair.

**Mr HOBBS:** Some \$60 million a year is coming in to this government from UniTAB and not one bent razoo is going back to racing.

**Mr Lawlor:** What about the grain subsidy?

**Mr HOBBS:** That is coming from the normal budget. This is money coming straight in from UniTAB and it is not going back to the industry. The government could take \$10 million off that and put it back and the racing industry would basically have a lot fewer problems than it has at the present time. It can be fixed. It has had five years to fix the funding. It cannot keep blaming the coalition or blaming old Joh or blaming the Boer War. It has to get on and do it itself. It cannot keep blaming somebody else. It has to do it itself. It is the government. The minister is totally useless and there is so much disappointment out there. It is so easy to fix. All she has to do is listen to people. The minister does not even go to the races anymore. If she went to the races they would boo her. That is the way it is.

There are many other issues to cover. In terms of health, I have over 428 signatures from residents of the Tara Shire Council calling for the Beattie government to improve the health services in the shire. There is a great government service in relation to the hospital and the doctor and so forth. It has had private practice there, but the private doctors have gone and it is in real trouble. The private doctors have gone—and I know it is not entirely the responsibility of the government to find private doctors—and what we need is some help. Because we cannot find private doctors, the state government is going to have to eventually put in place a second medical officer. If we get some help in the meantime, we may be able to find somebody else who will in fact save the government money in the long term. We need a lot more help to make that work, otherwise we are going to end up in real trouble. Hospital dentists is another issue that is particularly important in the western Darling Downs, Tara, Chinchilla and Miles. We just cannot find dentists. Dentists are really hard to find.

**Mrs Carryn Sullivan** interjected.

**Mr HOBBS:** I would like to take the member's interjection, but I have to get through a fair few more things. If I had more time—perhaps the member might allow me an extension of time—I would be happy to take the member's interjection.

There is also a severe lack of suitable housing for allied health professionals in communities such as St George, and many other members would have the same problem. The Patient Transit Scheme is stretched to the limit every year. For people living way out near Thargomindah who have to travel a long way—it is a long way out there—it is very difficult for them to get to those professional services that they need and that system is running out of money. It is just not satisfactory.

There is much concern from women in the south-west about the breast care nurse position, which provides support for women with breast cancer and psychological services. Those women and their families will not be refunded by Queensland Health when Commonwealth funding ceases in November 2003. That is very important.

In terms of natural resources, there is no compensation for the loss of property and management rights for landowners affected by the proposed high nature conservation area of 12,500 hectares at Gurulmundi in the southern Brigalow regional vegetation management plan near Miles. That is a system whereby it is decided that there is an area of high nature conservation value. The interesting thing was that in 1991 when the Gurulmundi waste dump was put in place, they found that

there were no conservation issues in that particular area. Now they have found some and want to lock it up, but they are not prepared to pay people for the inconvenience. That is freehold land that landowners cannot fence and where they cannot put in dams or roads. It is terrible.

What would happen in the city if someone came along and said, 'You can't have a garden in your yard. You can't put a border there. You can't put a fence up at the back'? There would be riots, but it is truly happening. It is just so terrible. Those people are devastated—absolutely devastated—that they have to go through this whole process when they bought their land freehold and went to all that cost. But they just cannot do it.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! What is the relevance to this debate?

**Mr HOBBS:** What is the relevance to this debate? Mr Deputy Speaker, I am talking about compensation for people who have been told that their land is going to be taken away from them. They have been told that they cannot do anything with it. It is freehold land. Does compensation apply? It should apply. That is the reason I am talking about it. Compensation should be paid. These people should not have to go through what this government is putting them through. It is an absolute disgrace.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I cannot see any relevance. The member will stick to the debate.

**Mr HOBBS:** This is the debate. This is what the debate is about. It is terribly important. This House should know how important this is. These people are being denied the use of the land that they bought. What if this were our house and somebody said we could not build a fence or plant a tree or a garden in the backyard? This is absolutely disgraceful.

Family services is another important area. The emergency relief funding for community support services has also not received a boost. It is particularly important that it is able to put some funds into that. The current funds allocated deal only with the tip of the iceberg in comparison with what is required by the support services for emergency relief funding. The need grows every year, but the funding does not. Emergency relief funds have been stretched well beyond their capacity because of the drought and bushfires—for example, in Chinchilla and Taree. There is not one new staff member allocated in this year's budget for the Department of Families. This does nothing to assist with case loads and child protection work.

Time expired.