



Speech by

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**MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER**

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

**Dr LESLEY CLARK** (Barron River—ALP) (10.31 a.m.): The *Cairns Post* summed up the budget for far-north Queensland with the front page headline 'Fair Share', and provided five pages of positive budget stories with good news for far-north Queensland in the areas that really matter—business, industry and families. I congratulate the Treasurer on another great Labor budget, because our region did indeed get a very fair share of the \$21.3 billion budget delivered this week. In fact, far-north Queensland received \$453.7 million in capital works alone as compared to \$416.7 million last year—an increase of \$37 million.

The Leader of the Opposition has claimed that the new coalition would present positive policies. So what was their response to the budget for far-north Queensland? The Leader of the National Party claimed that far-north Queensland was the only area of the state which suffered major capital works funding falls in the budget. Not only is this a very negative response; it is also absolutely untrue. What kind of accounting is he doing to claim that an increase of \$37 million is a fall in capital expenditure? In fact, at the risk of fuelling rivalry between Townsville and Cairns, it is worth noting that the capital works budget for the northern region, which covers Townsville and Cairns, was only \$353.5 million—almost exactly \$100 million less than for far-north Queensland. However, this budget is very good for all Queensland regions—with 62 per cent of the \$5.3 billion in capital works allocated outside the Brisbane Statistical Division. The opposition's criticism of this budget has no credibility whatsoever, as shown by economic and industry commentators such as Standard and Poor's director Rick Shepherd, who was quoted in the *Courier-Mail* as saying—

Despite the rise in liabilities Queensland's balance sheet remains the strongest of the Australian States.

Australian Industry Group, Queensland, director David Whiting praised the strong Smart State component of the budget which he said would improve the business environment and acknowledged our status as the low-tax state. In fact, Queenslanders will pay just over \$400 less per capita in tax than the average of the other states. Not only has the Treasurer delivered a fiscally sound budget; it is a budget that reflects our priorities as a Labor government that puts families first.

The centrepiece of the budget this year is the priority given to health and disability services. Both are areas of need in which increased funding will lead to an improvement in services and quality of life for Queenslanders. This budget provides for a \$300 million increase in the Health budget, which represents a 6.9 per cent increase to \$4.6 billion. This is part of a cumulative \$2.6 billion four-year increase in health spending on the 2002-03 budget, with \$1.6 billion to be contributed by the state and only \$1 billion to be contributed by the Commonwealth.

The statewide priority on health services is evidenced in the additional \$3.7 million in recurrent funding to the Cairns Health Service District. The Cairns Base Hospital has been experiencing pressure in responding to increased demand in a number of areas. I am pleased to report that the Minister for Health has responded to the representations made to her by all of us local Cairns members, with significant new and recurrent funding that will reduce hospital waiting lists.

The specific extra allocation for Cairns includes \$700,000 for cancer treatment services, \$2 million for renal dialysis to meet demand on hospital inpatient and home based services, \$200,000 for cardiac services, \$200,000 for the Cairns Base Hospital emergency department and \$100,000 for patient transport. Most importantly, there is \$500,000 to establish an integrated stroke and

rehabilitation service, delivering on a commitment that we as local members made earlier this year when young patients were being sent to Townsville instead of being treated in Cairns. I was pleased to hear that Queensland Health will be advertising immediately for a specialist director for this new service. In addition, the Cairns Health Service District will receive replacement health technology equipment valued at approximately \$2.26 million as part of the Health Technology Capital Program, which will spend \$52.9 million statewide.

Another highlight of the 2003-04 budget is an additional \$290.5 million in state funding over four years to Disability Services Queensland. This includes \$200 million in new funding to implement funding reform project initiatives which will provide improved services for people with a disability, their families and carers. This increased funding will see the budget for DSQ grow to \$385 million in 2003-04—an unprecedented increase of 16 per cent—to enable the wonderful organisations such as Endeavour and the Cairns Independent Living Support Association to continue to support people with disabilities in my electorate.

The most important issue for all families is jobs and secure employment. I turn to another area of major concern to people in far-north Queensland and my constituents in Barron River—that is, the tourist industry, which a major employer in our region. I spoke in the House recently about the severe impact of the Iraq war and the SARS epidemic on our tourist industry and the need for government support. Tourism Queensland and its 330 industry partners will be spending \$35 million selling our state in domestic and international markets in 2003-04 to help the industry recover from the SARS induced downturn in tourism.

The Where Else But Queensland TV campaign is running at the moment with wonderful images, many of them from far-north Queensland, to lure tourists from southern states. The Get On Up campaign, specifically targeted on far-north Queensland, increased domestic tourists to Cairns by seven per cent in April and continues to be successful using print advertising, Internet, billboards and consumer brochures. A spring marketing campaign during August, September and October is also planned to boost visitation from Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane together with campaigns for niche markets such as the youth, gay and honeymooners markets, which are very important for far-north Queensland.

Whilst additional funding has been provided to Tourism Queensland for special projects at various times of industry need, the base budget for Tourism Queensland 2003-04 is \$39.7 million—the highest in its 25-year history. The budget also continues to support the operation of regional tourism organisations including Tourism Tropical North Queensland and the local convention incentive bureau, who do an excellent job of marketing our region.

The government's support for the tourism industry is not limited to marketing, important as this is. The budget provides \$33 million for the upgrade of the rail line between Townsville and Cairns to facilitate the introduction of the tilt train, which will soon be bringing more tourists to Cairns. As the Transport Minister said in the House yesterday, the experience will 'knock your socks off'. I look forward to joining the minister at the celebration when the tilt train sets out from Cairns.

The Cairns airport is another critical piece of infrastructure for the tourist industry, and the budget allocation for the airport, as shown in Budget Paper No. 3, is \$37.5 million, including \$16.8 million for enhanced bag security screening, \$4 million for additional plane parking bays and \$5 million for the Hawker Pacific development. The CPA North Cityport development, including the new reef fleet terminal, was officially opened last week and that, together with The Esplanade and lagoon development to which the state government contributed \$11 million, is changing the face of Cairns and increasing our attractiveness for tourists.

Roads are also a vital part of our tourism infrastructure, and this budget provides additional funding for the \$3.6 million planning study to upgrade the Kuranda Range road, the vital link to the Cairns highlands, as the tablelands are now known. The tourism industry on the northern beaches, particularly Palm Cove and Trinity Beach, has been affected by the irukandji marine stingers, which caused four deaths and closed beaches for long periods. The government formed a whole-of-government task force to deal with this threat. I welcome the \$550,000 to be spent on irukandji research and community education over the next four years. We have a great researcher at JCU—Dr Jamie Seymour—who is working to better understand this marine stinger, and this money will significantly enhance his efforts. I hope that the development of an effective vaccine or antidote to treat sting victims will not be too far off, removing a significant threat to both tourists and locals enjoying our coastal and reef waters.

Protection and management of our natural assets is also critical for far-north Queensland tourism. The reef protection plan and the Misty Mountains Great Walk are two projects to receive additional support in this budget.

In my electorate the Cairns City Council has received a \$489,000 subsidy to improve the water quality from the northern water pollution control plant as part of a major project to meet the requirements of the government's coastal management plan for tertiary treatment that will reduce the level of nitrates and phosphates in sewerage outfalls into rivers like the Barron River, thereby improving water quality, which is so critical for the health of the reef and the tourism industry.

The support of the Beattie government for the tourism industry is in stark contrast to what the federal government is currently doing to the reef tourism industry. I was shocked to read in yesterday's *Cairns Post* that the Australian Taxation Office has sent out bills to dive industry operators—some for tens of thousands of dollars—to pay a 10 per cent GST on the environmental management charge levied on each ticket and this is to be retrospective over the last three years. This tax on a tax was never supposed to have happened, but the federal government has broken its promise to operators.

This situation came to light only when Senator Jan McLucas raised the issue at an estimates committee meeting in Canberra. Federal member for Leichhardt Warren Entsch has labelled this tax on a tax as an 'unacceptable development'. What a gross understatement this is. I urge the federal Labor opposition to keep up the pressure until the ATO ruling is reversed, because industry operators simply cannot afford this impost.

The other major aspect of the budget that I want to address is that of education, training, research and innovation—the cornerstones of the government's Smart State strategy. Our region cannot rely on tourism and agriculture alone but must take advantage of the latest technological advances to build the productive capacity of individuals and businesses and generate employment.

The quality of our education system is essential to the Smart State and the budget for Education this year is a staggering \$4.48 billion, and represents a 5.8 per cent increase in recurrent expenditure. The highlight of the Education budget is the employment of 636 extra state school teachers in 2004 at a cost of about \$42 million a year. This boost includes 327 teachers allocated over and above the usual growth and another 60 teachers to support students with special needs.

I am well aware of the Teachers Union campaign to reduce class sizes, but I believe that a targeted strategy such as we are providing is a better alternative approach, because it can put extra teachers where they are most needed and recognises that students in middle-class schools are different from those in areas of disadvantage, where there is a greater need for smaller classes.

The budget has once again delivered for my schools in Barron River. In particular, there is \$400,000 to replace the student toilet and shower block at the Holloways Beach Environmental Education Centre, and \$560,000 for two classrooms and toilets at Freshwater State School, which has experienced significant growth recently. My schools have also benefited from the Triple R program, and \$182,000 has been provided for repainting at Caravonica, Edge Hill, Kuranda and Trinity Beach State Schools.

Kuranda school will have roofing repairs carried out this year. The Cooler Schools program will also contribute \$171,000 towards airconditioning at Edge Hill, completing that school's airconditioning program, and will enable Kuranda school to aircondition its computer centre. The growth in Barron River, in particular in the Redlynch Valley and the northern beaches, means that we need to plan for the provision of education in the future, and I welcome the current study which is under way by the facilities branch of Education Queensland. This study will provide the information needed to determine the nature and timing of additional schools that will be required to cope with increased student enrolments. I am actively participating in this study, which should be completed by early August, and I look forward to engaging my school communities in this process. I share the aspirations of parents of students at Redlynch State School, who hope to see a high school built on land adjacent to the state school in the future.

However, schools are more than buildings and there is great work going on in my schools, with students achieving excellence in a wide variety of areas. I am particularly involved in the area of information technology in schools through my Smart Women—Smart State project initiated at the Premier's request last year to ensure that women are both contributing to and benefiting from our Smart State agenda. I have recently completed my report to the Premier on this project titled *SET for success—increasing the participation of women in science engineering and technology*, and I thank the Premier for his support for a key recommendation in this report, the creation of a new system of awards to be known as the Premier's Smart Women—Smart State Awards, which he described in this House yesterday.

Nominations for these awards open from today and I encourage women and girls to participate so that we can showcase their wonderful achievements and encourage more girls to embark on careers in science and technology that will shape the future in the Smart State. I look forward to seeing further recommendations from my report being implemented in due course.

An institution to be established with an allocation of \$4.5 million in the budget that will most definitely shape the future is the Australian tropical forest institute to be established adjacent to JCU Cairns campus on land that is to be acquired from the state government. I have been involved with this exciting initiative from its inception and I look forward to construction starting early next year.

Another Smart State initiative in the budget is a \$100 million four-year package that will be outlined in a document to be released shortly *Queensland—Smart State—investing in science research and innovation*. I hope that a \$5.5 million proposal for the creation of a tropical public health institute for research and development also proposed at JCU will be a recipient of some of this new funding.

The government's commitment to regional Queensland is evidenced in the four-year \$50 million Regional Centres Program. These projects are carried out in partnership with local government, which provides 50 per cent of the cost of each of the projects. I thank the Local Government Minister for her support for far-north Queensland, which has received funding for four major projects, one of which is in Barron River. The government will be providing \$1.95 million towards the Cairns City Council's \$3.97 million Botanic Gardens and Tanks Arts Centre Precinct Redevelopment. Both the Member for Cairns, Desley Boyle, and I have been pleased to support this exciting development, which will see the integration of the Botanic Gardens and Tanks complex into one cultural precinct linked by an elevated boardwalk, with a new restaurant, interpretative and administrative centre and tanks upgrade. The project will also address the longstanding traffic problems in Collins Avenue, with construction of a new car park for 100 vehicles, streetscaping, traffic management devices to slow the traffic, and bicycle and pedestrian facilities. These improvements will be welcomed by both Edge Hill residents and visitors to the gardens and Tanks Arts complex.

Finally, I would like to thank the Minister for Housing for his support for my efforts to improve housing in the indigenous communities in the Kuranda district. A major project is under way to redevelop the community of Top Kowrowa by replacing the existing old 10 attached units with 12 new detached houses. Following extensive community consultation to plan the layout of roads, open space and houses, this budget provides \$767,000 to begin construction of the first four houses in stage one. This \$4 million project will span some three to four years and will transform the lives of families in that community whilst also creating employment and training opportunities for local Aboriginal people. However, I will continue to work with ATSIC and the Department of Housing to provide additional housing in the Kuranda district, because there is still a great need in those indigenous communities. But there are other areas of need for public housing in my electorate outside of Kuranda, and I am pleased that funding has been made available for construction of another eight homes and the upgrade of six units.

In conclusion, I commend the Treasurer for another great budget, which will continue to support the ongoing growth and development of far-north Queensland and the diverse communities that make up my electorate of Barron River. I commend the bill to the House.