



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard 11 May 2004

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Federal Budget

Hon. P.D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.33 a.m.): If Peter Costello wants to be the Prime Minister, tonight's budget is his best chance to show he has a heart and that he cares for Australia's future. If he has as much as the mooted \$9 billion surplus, he must use it as a down payment on the future of Australia. Given the surplus prediction and given the low inflation and low interest rates, tonight is his night. If he fails, the warmth of the Lodge will be replaced with the cold of the Opposition Leader's office, and we all know what that is like. He must ensure that no child is deprived of an education. All students—be they in Brisbane or in Bamaga, be they in a prep year, be they at TAFE or finalising their doctorate—deserve to be treated equally and fairly. In vocational education and training funding, the Commonwealth can start by providing at least \$348 million over the next three years to immediately address short funding of the states and territories by the Commonwealth. The underfunding of Queensland's training system is based on a nineties formula of us having 15 per cent of the nation's population—not the present 19 per cent. This will cost us \$60 million over the next three years.

A caring Peter Costello should commit to ensure broadband access for families in the bush so that they can access distance education telephone teaching. He also needs to support the job of creating gains from improving our road network. Some \$600 million a year over the next five years would bring Queensland's National Highways to a reasonable standard. What about the funding of roads of national importance, including the Ipswich Motorway, the Gateway Motorway and building the Toowoomba Range bypass? An upgrade to the Barkly Highway from Mount Isa to Camooweal would also be appreciated by residents in the far west.

Mr Costello knows that he short-changed Queenslanders \$160 million in the latest health care agreement. This means fewer public hospital operations, and the decline in bulk-billing means extra demand on our emergency departments. If it was not for a \$110 million program being implemented in Queensland by the current Minister for Health, Gordon Nuttall, the situation would be even worse. We desperately need more university places for doctors, dentists and nurses, and we need them now. There are many things the federal government should focus on federally, including public housing for example. It has underfunded public housing for a long time, which means that the battlers of Australia have been missing out.

Mr Schwarten interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: I take the minister's interjection. On the bigger picture, the Commonwealth has made some reference to national competition policy payments beyond 2005-06. To date, it has not provided any details of the nature and size of any such payments. The Commonwealth should use this budget as an opportunity to declare its support for the recommendations of the Commonwealth Grants Commission's 2004 review and the underlying principle of fairness. This principle, which is under attack from New South Wales and Victoria, ensures that Queensland receives a fair share of GST revenue so that we can provide health, education and other vital services. Prior to introducing its GST, the Commonwealth made a commitment not to cut aggregate specific purpose payments, or SPPs, as part of its tax reform package. I

trust that the Australian government continues to meet its commitment to the states and territories in ensuring aggregate SPPs in real per capita terms remain at the level of SPPs in 1999-2000, the year before the new arrangements were in place.

I say clearly to New South Wales and Victoria that if they want a fight over the Grants Commission formula we are prepared to give them one. We believe that the federal government should stand firm against the pressures from New South Wales and Victoria. In the lead-up to the next federal election, we want a commitment from the federal government that it is going to stand firm in supporting the current formula and arrangement arising out of the Commonwealth Grants Commission. Those underlying principles of fairness mean a fair go for Queensland, and we will take on our Labor colleagues in New South Wales and Victoria if necessary. There are a number of other matters in terms of the budget that I want to draw to the attention of the House, and I seek leave to have them incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Our budgetary pressures will be compounded by population ageing. These pressures have not been recognised by the Commonwealth.

Mr Costello needs to recognise these demographic and growth realities facing Queensland, and adequately address them.

Part of that would be a renewed commitment to the Federally-funded \$12 million Violence Against Women campaign—unfortunately abandoned by Canberra before Christmas—this commitment is a must.

Queensland, like all Australian States and Territories, is experiencing a critical shortage in child care places. An estimated minimum of 2000 extra places are needed in outside school care alone in Queensland to address the shortage.

This year the Commonwealth agreement with the States over funding for Legal Aid expires. Proper Commonwealth legal aid funding, particularly in family law matters involving the welfare of children, is essential.

For the bush Mr Costello should ensure a continuation of the Federal Government's Rural Financial Counselling Service and ensuring counselling services are available to all in the sugar industry—including small business operators and mill workers.

There needs to be more spent on policing our northern waters. Last year (2003), there was a record 138 apprehension of foreign fishing vessels allegedly fishing illegally in northern Australian waters.

Recent detections of Mad Cow Disease in the US and Canada highlight the need for additional funding to upgrade our preparedness for possible exotic pest and disease incursions.

The Federal Treasurer should paint a clear picture for indigenous support. There needs to be clarification of funding following the demise of ATSIC/ATSIS.

Momentum has built over the last two to three years, particularly in Cape York, in progressing initiatives such as the COAG Trial sites, establishment of the Cape York Strategy Unit and general roll-out of Meeting Challenges, Making Choices.

Last year Peter Costello didn't even mention 'housing' once in his Budget speech. Homelessness is a national issue and needs national leadership.

They have had more than eight years in office yet housing is more unaffordable than ever before and while the States have been playing their part cutting stamp duty Canberra stands idly by.

I urge Mr Costello to restore funding for the Co-operative Research Centres in Far North Queensland.

Cutting funding threatens the \$1 billion reef-based tourism industry and the coastal centres which depend on it.

If John Howard can quite rightly find \$444 million to prop up the sugar industry, surely he can find some extra funding for these research centres?

Mr Costello should also reduce taxes holding back the State's wine industry.

As Queensland's production is concentrated in the small to medium producer area, the Wine Equalisation Tax (WET) discriminates against Queensland producers.

My Government supports the Winemakers' Federation of Australia proposal for the first 600,000 litres of wine produced by each winery for the domestic market to be free of the Wine Equalisation Tax.

And to finish off Mr Costello could make good on the Commonwealth's \$75 million promise to assist landholders affected by our new vegetation management laws.