



Speech by

Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard Friday, 10 June 2005

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (10.50 am): I will be addressing issues within my electorate and my portfolio, the latter of which I will pursue further during the estimates process. I say at the outset that if the estimates process is to be of true value to this state then it is time we had a Senate style estimates process with the powers to properly and fully scrutinise the budget and departmental performance and the opportunity to question public servants directly. That does not happen under the current system.

The estimates process must be reformed to allow greater accountability and scrutiny of the government's actions. For example, MPs should not be prevented from directly asking public servants questions. Also non-government MPs, particularly the National Party opposition, require greater freedom to fully pursue lines of questioning without unreasonable time constraints.

For example, the Transport and Main Roads portfolio has been assigned three hours for estimates questioning on 13 July. Half that time is for government members and of the non-government members' time one-third is assigned to non-opposition members. Thus, the National Party opposition has 60 minutes to ask questions which amounts to about 20 questions without notice and seven questions on notice.

Moving to issues within the budget. The Dr Death scandal which has claimed up to 87 lives and which is due to the corruption and bullying in the health department came on top of the previous health minister's disgraceful behaviour during the indemnity crisis which saw scores of qualified Australian doctors leave the public hospital system. A pattern of bullying and a shoot-the-messenger culture was raised to an art form under the previous health minister, Wendy Edmond. It continues today. This budget does not fix that.

The interim report from Tony Morris QC has been tabled this morning. Some of its observations and recommendations vindicate the concerns expressed by the National Party opposition. One of the issues is the need for Queensland Health to try to recruit doctors, particularly VMOs, visiting medical officers, to positions before trying less orthodox avenues.

Let me tell members what has happened on the Sunshine Coast. I relate this to today's budget. Today there are Sunshine Coast women who are being sent to the Logan Hospital for gynae procedures. The budget outlines that there will be new hospital facilities. I welcome additional health services particularly where they do not cannibalise existing services. But today women from right throughout the Sunshine Coast are being referred to Logan Hospital for gynae procedures. It is damnable that this health department promised that they would receive their services locally. Instead they have been told that it will be a two or three-year wait on the Sunshine Coast.

How does that relate to what happened with Wendy Edmond, the current disgrace in the health department and the visiting medical officers issue? Visiting medical officers spoke about quality issues and the indemnity crisis. They were rewarded by Queensland Health by having their sessions cut back. That is typical of the way this Beattie government has operated.

We see announcements about health in the budget but in reality the culture goes on. This culture has seen good people, appropriately qualified people leave the Sunshine Coast health system as well as

elsewhere in Australia. The Sunshine Coast health system relies heavily upon visiting medical officers who work in both the public and private system.

Let us look at what happened with the indemnity crisis. There was a time when the last existing indemnity providers had collapsed and we had public servants relying not only on public system indemnity but also on private indemnity. There were concerns about inadequacy of the indemnity cover of Queensland Health. When the private provider collapsed they realised that they did not have adequate cover from the Queensland Health system. They went to the then health minister Wendy Edmond and raised their concerns. She did not want to deal with it. She said that if they commit criminal acts then of course we are not going to cover them. That is not what the doctors were asking for. They were asking for the same level of indemnity cover that other professionals have. They did not want to be indemnified from criminal acts but they wanted the same level of insurance cover that any public servant operating within their area of expertise would have. She refused to listen, abused them and called them terrible people. These people who had been supplying services to the public system for years felt that they were worthless, felt that they were not wanted by the system. Many walked but others were pushed.

That is why today many services on the Sunshine Coast are still struggling to get back on an even keel. The state government still advertises certain positions and announces them at election time as being some new budget treat. But in fact they are old positions where it has forced well-qualified Australian people out of the positions.

Despite the promises of this government, Sunshine Coast women are being forced to go to Logan Hospital for gynae procedures or else face a two to three-year wait. That is unacceptable and farcical when we consider the growth on the Sunshine Coast. The hospital facilities there do have the capacity to do this work, but the government is not funding the staff to carry out this work and VMOs have had their sessions cut back.

I want to also address the issue of roads. Over the next four years a significant amount of funding is to be spent in my electorate. I welcome that though I will continue to draw people's attention to the fact that for seven years there has been an infrastructure drought under this government. For seven years we have seen infrastructure dip, as a proportion of the overall budget. This budget starts to address that. Still only about 15 per cent of the overall budget is being assigned to this area. Our concern is that unless infrastructure, particularly in the boom times, is adequately and consistently funded then we are going to have a big problem when the wheel turns and the boom times are not as rosy.

I welcome the allocation of \$33.6 million towards roads in my electorate as part of a four-year program for \$270 million upgrades on the Sunshine Motorway and Maroochydore Road. However, I repeat my calls for the Maroochy River Bridge on the Sunshine Motorway to be fast-tracked. Currently, 10,000 vehicles in excess of what the bridge should carry travel over that bridge on a daily basis. That is the arterial road that services the whole of the Sunshine Coast, not just my electorate. People from Noosa through to Caloundra commute through that area. It is impacting upon business and upon people's quality of life.

I campaigned on the need for the bridge's duplication at the last election and the government refused to fund it. While I was pleased that after the election the government did include it in the Roads Implementation Program and mooted it in the budget, there still needs to be more funding in this budget in order to fast-track that project. At the start of this year Main Roads told me that it was investigating how to bring the project forward. I note that when the Premier later visited the Sunshine Coast he confirmed those investigations were under way, as I was previously advised. However, I believe more can be done. I urge him to do it. Currently the whole of the Sunshine Coast is paying the price of the infrastructure drought that he forced upon Queensland and upon our area.

I believe there are interim improvements that could be made to traffic through the Pacific Paradise roundabout and also the Ocean Drive intersection which I have drawn to the attention of Main Roads. I am awaiting its advice on that. I have been advised that some presettlement works may take place on some of the new lanes to the north and south of the bridge towards the end of the year. This would mean that road fill would be put in these lanes and allowed to settle for 12 months which is in keeping with geotechnical requirements. But still more needs to be done. That is why I will continue to raise this issue and demonstrate to the government that it must listen to the people. They have spoken strongly about this issue.

Some \$5.8 million is allocated to the Pacific Paradise bypass and interchange. The construction work is expected to start towards the end of 2006 with completion in early 2008. About \$5 million of the \$35 million has been allocated to the southern access ramps of the Sunshine Motorway. This is due to start in mid-2006 and be completed by June 2007. The southern access itself is a council road but the ramps are a state responsibility.

Design work on the Maroochy River bridge and duplication works up to Maroochydore Road roundabout has an allocation of \$1 million out of the \$110 million total. Maroochydore Road at Kunda Park to the Bruce Highway has an allocation of \$21 million of the \$90 million. Construction on the Kunda Park

section is to start later this year for completion in 2006. The Bruce Highway to Pike Street section will start in mid-2006 and be completed in 2007.

But, as many landowners know, the land acquisitions and the route were resolved five to six years ago. This is just indicative of the fact that a lot of planning has been done—and I welcome appropriate planning—but the planning processes have been allowed to be strung out on all of these projects, particularly the Pacific Paradise bypass. That situation has been ludicrous beyond extreme in that there was not even a detailed design option or a preliminary design option in a planning study that lasted about six years from its conception to its completion. That is the sort of stupidity we have seen with this government.

Let us talk further about roads. The Tugun bypass fiasco continues. The budget papers show that not one red cent of the \$22.6 million for the Tugun bypass last year was spent. It has simply been rolled forward to this year. So \$22.6 million allocated last year for the Tugun bypass was not spent and the project spending to date has actually been cut. To add insult to injury, the minister is conning Queenslanders that the project is still on track. Maybe he should get on down there for a 'non' sod turning ceremony, because if it is on track then his own budget papers have red ink and lies written all over them. Despite what has obviously been a massive budget blow-out in the operational cost of the TransLink integrated public transport project, total transport portfolio capital spending has only increased to 35.46 per cent compared to 45 per cent under the last Nationals-led government.

Unfortunately, this increased transport portfolio funding is not being equitably distributed, with the percentage of road funding in the Brisbane region increasing by almost two per cent while funding in the regions of Wide Bay, Darling Downs, south-west, central-west, Mackay and north Queensland has reduced in percentage terms. Unfortunately, the Beattie government is squandering a unique opportunity to invest in Queensland's future with the majority of meaningful infrastructure projects still only on the political horizon two decades away—two decades away! I do welcome long overdue increases in capital spending after the capital infrastructure drought under the Beattie government, but I do criticise the cuts to councils' road funding. There have been cuts to councils' road funding, and that is really going to impact. Road funding is budgeted to increase from \$946 million to \$1.252 billion thanks to the GST and increased federal road funding. In percentage terms, road funding has increased to 15.7 per cent of the state's capital spending, up from the miserable 13.45 per cent last year. But this is still well down from the record 24 per cent under the last Nationals-led government. With regard to the transport infrastructure scheme, which provides funding to local councils, I was critical earlier in relation to those issues and the way in which this government has managed them.

I also want to address issues in my electorate and the funding allocated in this budget towards the strategy for the Mooloolah River mouth or Mooloolaba harbour. I gave the government a big belt over the fact that it had allowed the silting up of this important port harbour and that it was very slow to act when it came to the need to dredge this particular river mouth. Finally, we forced its hand and I was pleased that it finally acted. Obviously I will be interested in the results of the strategy that will be implemented. I have campaigned very strongly about the need to ensure that the port harbour mouth is available as a safe harbour mouth. It is a train harbour mouth and has been one of the safest access points on the east coast until recent years because of the neglect due to a lack of maintenance by this government. There is a very important fishing industry there. Many people on the Sunshine Coast do not realise that the fishing industry is worth about \$80 million in gross turnover of product—that is a huge amount—but the multiplier effect is far greater. Then of course there is the recreational fishing industry and recreational boating in general. It is extremely important that that is a safe harbour entrance and that it is maintained as such. I have mentioned in a previous address the changes to land tax. I believe that they are certainly necessary with the increases in property values, and I welcome the alteration to the thresholds.

What is important from an environmental point of view, though, is more investment in the area of water and waste water management, and this is an issue where the Beattie government has failed dismally. My colleagues have continually raised the need for appropriate funding assistance to help get the grey water project to the downs off the ground, but in addition to that very important project there are other areas of Queensland, too, where proper waste water recycling provisions need the subsidy and the assistance of government. It is big ticket stuff, but it is about the future. We do need good conservation and recycling of water. We do need additional water facilities. It is within the province of governments to ensure that these things are delivered in a timely way. Only too recently a number of towns in Queensland have come very close to running out of drinking water during this drought, let alone rural and regional areas which are already suffering not just from a lack of drinking water; their production has also suffered due to a lack of water supply. It has been too easy in our urban areas—and I live in an urban area—where we have taken it for granted that water would be on tap, but without proper infrastructure and investment in this area, which are lacking with this government, that is a very real threat. We are sitting right on the cusp at this time. It is time for action with infrastructure spending and recycling spending, and that action is disappointingly not present within this budget.

Other project funding has been mooted within the budget with regard to child safety, and this continues to be a major area of concern to me. The funding increases in this area have been necessary in recent years, but what we have seen instead is a leaderless department in great distress as children continue not to be seen in a timely manner. I am most concerned that, once again, despite budget allocations, with regard to the accountability to ensure that staff are supported and, most importantly, potentially abused children are seen within the nominated times, this budget simply does not address these issues. It is not only a case of how much money there is; it is how well it is spent. In recent years there has been a deficit in good management, a deficit in good accountability by this government. Certainly, as evidenced by the health system, it is tragic when accountability is taken out of a system and we see the impact that that has on real lives. In my electorate there has been a recategorising of children who have been on the waitlist for investigation as being potentially abused. They have been downgraded to a status where they will never have a visit or maybe not even a phone call and follow-up. That, to my mind, is a recipe for disaster and is a recipe which is of great concern to our community.

I also want to address the issue of public transport on the Sunshine Coast and the need to fast-track these provisions, as well as the upgrade of the north coast railway line. Maroochy does need a new transit centre to help facilitate increases in public transport. CAMCOS has been one of those studies that has been out there for six or eight years now; it is certainly over six years since its inception. That corridor is under acquisition and some bus priority measures are being considered, but those recommendations have been on the table for years. Once again, we have seen some fairly paltry allocations when one considers that the report was there, the recommendations were there, the action plans, if the government was telling the truth, were there but the money was not. Until these issues are addressed in a timely way, we will see a desperate catch-up without proper and timely delivery of these services in a way that meets the growing needs of a very diverse area such as the Sunshine Coast. I would certainly impress upon the government that our public transport needs and in particular the CAMCOS corridor need to be fast-tracked and brought forward.

I have one last comment to make with regard to the Maroochy River bridge. It relates to public transport and alternative transport. Once again, I urge the minister to ensure that there are pedestrian and cyclist connections on the bridge to the north and to the south. Although the minister has previously given positive indications that these connections would be considered, it is essential that we have not only proper road networks but also alternative transport networks for cycling. I am referring not only to recreational cycling but also to commuting cycling. In this day and age, I know that many people want to choose green transport alternatives.