



Speech by

**Ray Hopper**

**MEMBER FOR DARLING DOWNS**

Hansard Friday, 9 June 2006

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## **APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL**

**Mr HOPPER** (Darling Downs—NPA) (12.40 pm): I would like to touch on the positives and the negatives of what my electorate has received in this budget. I am very pleased to announce that Dalby Hospital will receive \$9.8 million. We lobbied the previous health minister, Gordon Nuttall, very hard and we met with Mike Keran, the district director, and Colleen Rasmussen, the DON at Dalby. We did a tour of that hospital and Gordon came out, and I know that the minister did put that funding in place and these are the fruits of that visit. So it is great to see that the outpatients, maternity and emergency sections will receive money; that is really good to see.

There will be two new ambulance officers for the Darling Downs region, \$6.6 million for public housing across the Darling Downs region and \$16 million for the New England Highway from Highfields to Crows Nest. That is a massive growth area in Queensland. There is a four-lane highway going in at Highfields, but my electorate goes from Highfields to Crows Nest and it will be great to see that road upgraded. There is \$324,000 to the Dalby State School for the administration building, and that is a carry-over from \$745,000 previously.

One good thing is the \$9.5 million provided for the reinforcement of the power supply to the Dalby region. That is good to see with the summer storms coming up and because it is a growth area with the mining going into the electorate. There is also \$6.5 million to be put towards land acquisition for the Toowoomba bypass. I know that there is going to be a lot of acquisition in the Charlton area with the industrial estate being put in, working with Jondaryan shire and the Toowoomba City Council. A lot of those people have been discussing prices for their land with the acquisition. They have to move home and it is hard to put a figure on exactly what that compensation should be. There is also \$220,000 for the new police station at Oakey.

Unfortunately, many projects in the Darling Downs electorate were not successful. I have worked tirelessly to secure each of them and I will continue to do so on behalf of the electorate. I will touch on these later in my speech, but they involve the upgrade of the Warrego Highway from Dalby to Miles, east of Warra; the upgrade of the Warrego Highway from Toowoomba to Dalby; the Bowenville-Norwin Road upgrade; air conditioning for all our state schools; the removal of asbestos from our state schools; and the provision of two police liaison officers in Dalby.

I am devastated by the government's apparent disregard for rural Queensland. This will be the fourth year in a row that the budget of the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries has suffered a fall. In 2005-06, the DPIF spent \$336 million; however, for the 2006 budget year, its estimated expenditure is \$308 million, thus verifying a steady downward trend. Here is the history of the DPIF's budget funding to date: in 2002-03, the DPIF had a budget of \$352 million; in 2003-04, it was \$345 million; in 2004-05, it went to \$337 million; in 2005-06, it went to \$336 million; and now the budget estimate is \$308 million. So what do we have? We have a DPIF with its resources being sucked dry. These are our electorates, these are our people, these are the resources that our rural producers need and it is just disgusting to see that this department has been sucked dry and its money is going into other departments. This government regards this department as a very minor part of government, and that will certainly change after the next election.

The government's record in itself defies the Premier's claim that he would 'look after the bush'. He is running around with the blueprint having a great time. The government has the backing of AgForce, but where is the guts of it? The proof is in the pudding, and this department has a definite lack of funds. We need the minister to argue in cabinet for this department, but so far we have not seen it under Palaszczuk or Mulherin.

The water issue, which is of great concern to everyone, particularly in the south-east, has been totally neglected in this budget. After months of hearing the government claim it is about to build new water infrastructure in south-east Queensland, the state budget confirms that very little has been allocated to start building a single dam. While there is nothing new to boost water supplies, Labor's planned water taxes—which would rip millions of dollars out of rural and regional economies and cost irrigators up to \$8,000 a year—are still on the agenda. I cannot believe that the Beattie government has the audacity to continue to build on the last eight years of neglect of the water infrastructure. Does it not really see or understand what is going on here, or is it simply a matter that the government does not give a 'dam' literally about rural and regional Queensland? Let us see what the electorate says after the next election.

I will return to those things that we missed out on and some of the things that we received. We have liaised with the Oakey Police Station on a number of occasions, and the funding was allocated. A prefabricated building will be placed on site during the next few weeks, and police have today relocated to the ambulance station. I have fought very hard to get two police liaison officers for Dalby. At least the current police minister, Ms Spence, has had the decency to tell me that I cannot get them; every other police minister has just let that issue drag along. She advised us in a letter I received on 26 April that the request was unsuccessful due to other policing priorities in the Dalby district. We have at least 800 Indigenous people living there now, and that number is increasing. These police liaison officers do a great job. When there is a function on or if there is a blue, these liaison officers move in so that the police officers do not have to come, and the situation settles down. The Indigenous people respect PLOs, and we definitely need them. The police minister has said that we can get them from the Goondiwindi district, but quite often there is no time to get them from another district. That is just one issue I have been on the bandwagon about.

I want to talk about the lack of service providers—for example, psychiatrists and psychologists—in Dalby for mental health patients. A visiting psychiatrist has been secured for the region and is based in Dalby. A telemedicine outreach service based in the Brisbane office is available for emergency cases. We have lost the principal radiographer and ultrasonographer for the Northern Downs Health District. That is devastating for Dalby. Other towns like Warwick have private practices which local GPs send their patients to—but not Dalby. When people break their bones or have problems, they have to go to the hospital and use the hospital's health services. So that service has been withdrawn, and it is very sad for the district. I have spoken with Mike Keran and he will speak with the minister about this. There are currently negotiations with another provider.

Dental services are in very high demand in our area. I am pleased to see that we have secured a dentist for another 12 months. Also, all the physiotherapist positions are currently filled, so that is good.

We have recently had another fatality on the Warrego Highway between Dalby and Miles. There have been two fatalities on the one section just east of Warra, and it is horrific. I have taken the fight on very hard. We have had 12 very desperate accidents there. The road is simply too thin. The shoulders of the road are too steep and semitrailer drivers would rather take the side mirrors off their trailer than move off the road. That is exactly what is happening there and there have been a number of fatalities.

I have made representations to Bruce Scott, because it is a federal road, to Warren Truss, to Jim Lloyd, to Paul Lucas and to Gil Heaton, the district director. I tabled a petition in parliament this week with 1,675 signatures, and I do not take that lightly. There were 1,675 people in that little area who were willing to put their signatures on the petition to say that the lack of maintenance on that highway is having a devastating effect. We are here to save lives; that is exactly what this is all about.

The federal government told me that the state government is totally in control of the allocation of funding and that that funding has been put through the AusLink program. But that funding is not coming to that section of road. We have to fight very hard to upgrade this section of road. I congratulate Maurie Kingston from Dalby, who lost his daughter-in-law a month ago on that stretch of road. He has taken up that fight hard. He has come to me, he has been to Bruce Scott and he is in the paper all the time. Imagine losing a loved one. She was the mother of two little darling kids. It is absolutely horrific when a beautiful life is snatched away so suddenly.

In relation to the widening of the existing pavement of the Warrego Highway from Toowoomba to Dalby there was an allocation of \$2.2 million. The federal government had previously allocated \$4.9 million. The amount of \$2.8 million has been spent to date. This has been going on for a long time. The government has to get its act together, get this funding in place and do something about these roads. New work was scheduled for May, June, late 2006 and early 2007. On 1 March I asked a question on notice and the minister responded that under the new five-year AusLink agreement there was no new

money committed to the western rural National Highway. Yet the money that is there is not being distributed and spent properly. We have to seriously look at this.

Our schools need air conditioning. The Dalby State High School is right on the Warrego Highway where trucks stop at the traffic lights and then take off. In the hot summer months every window on the western side of that school is open as wide as it can be to try to get a bit of air circulation in those classrooms. Because of the noise of the trucks stopping at the traffic lights outside the school and then taking off, the teachers cannot hear themselves think. They are not only hot but also going deaf. Members would be aware of the amount of transport that travels on that road. Something needs to be done. If we could air-condition those rooms, those windows would be shut and it would be a comfortable learning environment in our state school system. This is one of the schools that we definitely have to look at air-conditioning. I have already touched on the removal of asbestos.

There is a farmer named John Cleary who lives on the Bowenville-Norwin Road. John has come to me on many occasions about this road. I have made many, many representations to try to get it fixed up. It is a state road. An initial representation was made on 27 January 2004. The last ministerial response was 10 November 2005 and it stated that this road was delegated as a local road of regional significance with funding and priorities decided by regional road groups—in this case the Eastern Downs Regional Road Group. The estimated cost is \$1.7 million to government, and it stated that this is outside of the RRG scope of affordability. What it is saying is that this is a road that is no good but it cannot afford to fix it. Why is it governing Queensland if it just pushes things aside? It is simply not good enough; it is unacceptable.

This is going on all the time in relation to our state government roads. The Kaimkillenbun Road going into Dalby is in a mess. It is very costly for councils to build roads on self-mulching black soil. As soon as it gets wet the road moves because the soil expands and contracts with the moisture. It is very hard to put a base down and very expensive.

We have a problem in relation to our rural fire brigades. Sometimes when there is a major accident or a fire our rural fire brigade officers are called on to undertake traffic control. The officers have to do a traffic control course and become registered traffic controllers to be allowed to go out and control traffic during a rural fire or an accident. We have been told that they have to pay to do the course. If a person wants to be a volunteer firefighter, they have to pay to do the course so they can have this little piece of paper to say that they are good enough to say 'stop' to a car instead of letting it drive through a smoke or fire hazard. The cost of that course for 10 volunteers amounts to \$1,931.50—that is \$99 per person plus 85c a kilometre. It is costing around \$200 per trip. The cost would need to be met through fundraising efforts within the community. Rural fire brigades generate income from the proceeds of barbecues and dances, and that money comes from the community itself. It is a service provider that the state government has to take responsibility for. I believe that these payments should be met; it is as simple as that. I have forwarded representations to Pat Purcell, the Minister for Emergency Services. If he is listening now, I hope he will take heed of that.

The Dalby Agricultural College is in my electorate. Recently there has been massive job shedding there. There used to be 120 staff members working at that college and it is now down to about 60. The morale in the college is slipping away. It is very, very hard. I have worked closely with the principal and I worry about its future. The minister has to look at our rural based training and see what is going on. We have taken it to the minister in the past. Enrolments have slowed, as has capital works funding. We have to seriously look at it. It is a great institution. It has a 100 per cent job placement rate. What other training system has those sorts of figures?

I heard the member for Charters Towers give a very, very good speech in relation to our Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme. The opposition has called for a review, seeking an increase of 10c to 20c per kilometre on the existing rate. I have also done a lot of media in relation to this issue. We have people close to us who have to tap into these things. Representations have been made by me on eight separate issues in relation to the School Transport Assistance Scheme. We need an increase in funding allocation.

In closing, 1,500 people a week move to Queensland. I challenge members to stand up in the Annexe and look across the freeway and ask themselves what infrastructure they can see that this government has put in place in eight years. All they will see is the fruits of what the opposition did when it was in power.

**Mr Reeves:** Get real.

**Mr HOPPER:** Absolutely. We built Queensland. If I was a member of the Labor Party I would hang my head in shame, because they will go down in history as being one part of this useless government. There has been no infrastructure, a footbridge and a football stadium. We have got a puddle that those opposite call Paradise. That was implemented by us. Those opposite had to continue on and build it. That is the only dam that has been built by this government. What did Sir Joh do? Look at the Bowen Basin, the Burdekin and the electric train system. We built the South-East Freeway. What can members see that this government has done?

**Mr WALLACE:** I rise to a point of order. It was the Hawke Labor government which funded the Burdekin Dam.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Fouras): There is no point of order.

**Mr HOPPER:** I have listened to this rabble before many, many times. The truth is that we are hitting a raw nerve here because we are sitting opposite members who are part of a government that has done nothing.

**Mr Cummins** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order!

**Mr HOPPER:** Some of these speeches may have been government members' last contributions to their political career, because if the Premier calls an election they will not be here; they are gone. There is going to be a big clean-out. I know that the member for Kawana will be looking for another job for sure. In relation to the Gympie dam that we have all heard so much trash about in the last couple of months, \$50 million has been put in this budget for land acquisition. If the dam is not built it is not a bad investment, because that land is only going to go up in value. It is not costing anything. There is no real money put forward for water in Queensland at this moment. This Gympie dam is just a sham.

If the government does not build this dam—say for some reason it is not allowed to and work does not progress—it has destroyed the lives of 960 farmers and families that live in that area because their place is worthless now. They cannot sell it; they cannot do a thing with it. The real estate industry in that area has had it and the dairy industry will be had it. This is a farce and a joke. It is a continuation of the governance that we have seen over the last eight years.