



Speech by

Robert Messenger

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Hansard Friday, 9 June 2006

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (11.12 am): This budget is an admission of eight years of Labor neglect. This budget represents the Labor Party trying to play catch-up after historically losing three by-elections in a row. There is the ugly smell of desperation about this budget. The Treasurer and other members opposite have tried to disguise this ugly smell with the perfume of slick rhetoric. Time after time we have heard echoing around this chamber the words 'It's a record budget, it's a record spend.' As the member for Beaudesert pointed out, since 1989 every government can claim that its budget represents a spending record. The question is: where is the money being spent?

Fundamentally, this budget has a big hole. That hole is a mile wide. Everyone can see it. It is a \$3 billion hole. Even the most fiscally challenged member can see that there is a \$3 billion hole in this almost \$29 billion budget. It represents a 10 per cent hole in the budget. This government has not properly budgeted for the Premier's promise to build his megadam on the Mary River near Gympie. This dam will be an absolute environmental disaster. This dam will be an absolute social disaster. This budget proves that this dam will also be an absolute financial disaster. The Premier is good at putting projects and infrastructure on the state's bankcard—on the never-never—but the true cost of this dam is nowhere to be found in this document or in any other document that the Premier has presented to this House.

People do not have to be financial geniuses to work out that the Premier's monstrosity on the Mary River will cost the state at least \$3 billion, with 7,600 hectares to be flooded at an estimated average cost of \$30,000 per hectare. The land buyback will be greater than \$2 billion. If the cost of the pipeline, the rerouting of roads and the public infrastructure that will be flooded by the Premier's dam are added, we see that the true cost of this dam will be close to \$3 billion. There goes the projected \$2.8 billion surplus in this new Treasurer's budget.

This budget is a pathetic and dishonest attempt at political catch-up from a tired, arrogant government that is looking down the political barrel of an election that has a couple of figures that are going to haunt this Premier and his Labor colleagues: zero three-cornered contests. The swagger has gone out of the walks of the Labor members for Mudgeeraba, Broadwater, Redlands and Hervey Bay, because they know that they are facing one of the strongest cohesive Liberal and National Party conservative campaigns.

To borrow a phrase from the Prime Minister, the Premier and his new Treasurer are trying to fatten the pig on market day. This budget is an admission of eight years of Labor neglect. Combined with the strongest Liberal and National Party coalition in the history of Queensland politics, this budget is ultimately—

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr English): Order! While honourable members of this House take a breather, I would like to welcome into the public gallery students, staff and parents from Robina State School in the electorate of Robina, which is represented in this House by Mr Bob Quinn.

Mr MESSENGER: Ultimately, this budget is hope for the conservative side of this House. This Labor budget provides Queenslanders with a choice as to whether they will accept it or not. Very shortly we will

have an election. At that election the families—the mums and dads of Queensland—can have a say on who they trust to fix their health system, who they trust to provide a public education system that works, who they trust to get their priorities right and actually deliver services.

This budget is not worth the paper that it is written on. We have learned the hard way not to trust this Premier and his government. As witnessed by the Bundaberg Hospital royal commission, we have learned that this Premier and his government are literally prepared to sacrifice Queenslanders' lives in order to prevent a cover-up being exposed and the resultant bad news released so that they can remain in power. They will do anything to remain in power. No falsehood is too deceitful. No cover-up is too outrageous for this Labor government. I am truly amazed by the ability of those opposite to be able to close their eyes and sleep at night. The members opposite collectively have the blood of at least 13 victims of Patel on their hands.

Mr LEE: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. Those comments are a reflection on most people here. I certainly find them offensive and I ask that they be withdrawn.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr English): Order! They were not directed at you personally.

Mr MESSENGER: Because they supported the cover-up, not once have they asked the hard questions of their political leaders. Yesterday I questioned the Attorney-General over this government's special mediation and compensation process for Patel victims—a process that requires an elderly woman to be subjected to some very silly questions relating to body piercing, tattoos, sexual relationships, whether she was a bankrupt and whether she was sexually molested as child. After hearing the words straight from a Patel victim about how they are being made to feel as though they are to blame—

Mr Terry Sullivan interjected.

Mr MESSENGER: The member for Stafford is on very shaky ground. Through you, Mr Deputy Speaker, I suggest that the member for Stafford is the most least qualified to comment on Patel patients since he led the charge—

Ms Nolan: 'Most least'?

Mr MESSENGER: The least qualified since he led the charge vilifying me when I brought this subject up in parliament. Did the Attorney-General in her answer give an undertaking to investigate these very disturbing facts? Did she give an undertaking to investigate this special mediation process?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I have given you some leniency. I will give you a short period of time to come back to the budget.

Mr MESSENGER: In speaking to the budget, I would like to say that there are no additional funds allocated for the special compensation process or enough money being set aside so that Patel victims receive fair and just compensation.

We need look no further than the environment portfolio to discover one of the many great Labor untruths. The Premier does not care about the environment. He does not care about the votes. He really only cares about the votes that are attached to the issue of the environment. In the nuclear debate we had two days ago, he exposed his true feelings. I would have to agree with the Queensland Greens environment spokeswoman Juanita Wheeler, who said earlier this year that Mr Beattie's only concern about uranium mining was whether it would affect the coal industry, not whether it was bad or good for the environment. That is what the debate was about.

Labor, the supposed great champion of environmental protection with a budget of almost \$29 billion and with a projected massive surplus of \$2.8 billion, has allocated a whopping 1.01 per cent, \$294.488 million, to the protection of our environment. Just to put that in context, that means that, for the 4,081,043 people who are expected to populate this state by June 2007, \$72.15 per Queenslanders will be spent on environmental protection. Three budgets ago in 2003-04, according to Parliamentary Library research, with a population of 3,801,039 and a total spend of—

Mr WALLACE: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I just want to know whether the member for Burnett is the same person who added up the figures for the coalition budget papers?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Mr MESSENGER: Three budgets ago in 2003-04, according to Parliamentary Library research, with a population of 3,801,039 and a total spend of \$379,002,000, this government spent \$99.71 per Queenslanders on environmental protection. When compared with 2003-04 figures, this budget shows an intention by this Labor government to decrease expenditure on environmental protection by 38 per cent per capita.

Mrs Miller: Why don't you talk about the Burnett?

Mr MESSENGER: The environment under this Labor government has been neglected and is in a state of disrepair. Feral pigs, wild dogs, imported pests and weeds are threatening the biodiversity of our native flora and fauna, and this state government is putting the responsibility back on local governments

and landowners. It is shirking its responsibility. If the member would like me to talk about the Burnett, I would be only too glad to.

In my own backyard, waterweeds are threatening the ecosystems, threatening iconic endangered species in the Burnett and Kolan rivers. This government has the audacity to rake in more than \$40 million in profit from the government owned corporation SunWater yet will not do anything substantial or significant to try and solve this problem. This government is prepared to watch while more than 500 hectares of waterweed infest our rivers. This government prefers to do nothing when faced with obvious environmental damage—for example, salt intrusion from ill-designed prawn farms in north Queensland—and then overreact, such as banning horse riding in state forests, to what would appear to be minimal or insignificant environmental damage. This policy is repeated all over Queensland, where the schizophrenic management of the environment has left many people in the communities shaking their heads in disgust.

As well as a real decrease in funds available for environment protection and management, the Labor government has decreased the total staff numbers. Under staffing by employment type, as at June 2005 the head count of total staff was 2,331. According to this year's ministerial portfolio statement, the estimated actual staff number is 2,111—a decrease of 220 employees, or approximately 9.4 per cent. Who is going to manage and protect the extra land from feral pests and weeds which is supposed to be acquired under future developments? There is allocated in this budget \$23 million for land acquisitions in south-east Queensland and the Cape York Peninsula. Everyone knows that in Cape York alone there are more than 20 million feral pigs, yet there is nothing in this budget which gives me the confidence that this government is trying to fix this substantial and significant environmental problem.

A 2005 report written by a JCU PhD candidate and commissioned by the Wilderness Society highlights the underrepresentation by Indigenous people employed as rangers, being only five per cent 'while 60 per cent of the resident population in Cape York Peninsula is of Indigenous descent'. The Wilderness Society makes the following valid points: a key to the successful long-term management of national parks and other protected areas on Cape York Peninsula is the greater involvement of traditional owners and Indigenous communities in park management. Indigenous knowledge and involvement are urgently required to maintain healthy ecosystems and fauna and flora population in Cape York Peninsula's protected areas. QPWS would do well to increase the number of Indigenous identified positions in both ranger and administrative roles and Indigenous liaison ranger staff within Cape York Peninsula in recognition of the rights and interests of the traditional owners. Traditional owners could be contracted to perform natural resource and other management tasks within their country. I call upon the minister to increase the numbers of Indigenous employees within the EPA.

We have a coalition vision to establish a water-recycling project incorporating a program towards zero ocean outfalls to be achieved over an eight-year period. Queensland has 32 ocean outfalls which release approximately 422 million litres per day of semitreated effluent into our pristine estuary systems and along the state's coastline. It is the coalition's long-term vision to eliminate ocean outfalls through a zero ocean discharge policy and the implementation of recyclable water projects. The Queensland coalition government, when elected, will inject \$300 million into water-recycling initiatives to ensure that more waste water is recycled for agriculture, business and industry use.

I note that the regional budget statements are for broad districts. The Wide Bay-Burnett district includes the electorates of Burnett, Bundaberg, Hervey Bay and Maryborough. There are no budget statements based on electorates. I think that for clarity there should be budget statements based on electorates. The amounts actually spent in the regions are not recorded fully in the budget papers. The capital statement gives an actual figure for each portfolio but not for each district.

In relation to Education, there does not appear to be any capital expenditure in the Burnett. In relation to Emergency Services, I am grateful for the \$110,000 for the redevelopment of the Miriam Vale fire station and \$700,000 to purchase rural operations land for an auxiliary station in Agnes Water. In relation to Employment and Training, there is going to be a redevelopment of the TAFE in Bundaberg. I am appreciative of the money that is being given for that—over \$2 million.

In Agnes Water, there is the reinforcement of the Ergon Energy electricity supply, which is a project that I have been hounding the minister about since I was elected. Brownouts and blackouts have continued at Agnes Water and they will not be fixed until we have that substation. Agnes Water is in a difficult position because both electricity and water are in short supply. I have to congratulate the Agnes Water and 1770 communities and the Miriam Vale Shire Council. The council is proactive. Since 1993, it has had a policy of compulsory rainwater tanks, which has gone a long way to alleviating the water problems the towns are facing, but it desperately needs to look at other options of getting fresh water, and desalination is one of those options. Desalination can never be an option until there is a reliable electricity supply, and the \$19.2 million to be spent on the reinforcement of the electricity supply is welcome.

While I am on the subject of the Miriam Vale Shire Council, I want to address one other issue. The Miriam Vale Shire Council is in many ways, as I have mentioned, a progressive council. It has been going through a few tough issues around staff employment. I have referred a number of issues to the CMC. I would like to table a statutory letter of declaration from Jo Gillies, the architect making serious allegations about senior staff at the Miriam Vale Shire Council.

I have forwarded a letter on to the CMC—

Mr WALLACE: Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: I believe this is a budget debate; I do not know what it has got to do with corruption at the Miriam Vale Shire Council.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Jarratt): There is no point of order.

Mr MESSENGER: I urgently call on the CMC and the local government minister to investigate this very serious issue.

There are many capital expenditure issues in the Wide Bay-Burnett area that I wish to speak about. I am happy for the Environmental Protection Agency to spend money on the office upgrades in the Great Sandy National Park, but I do note that we have missed out in the area of health. There is no expansion of the health services in the Bundaberg Hospital, no upgrade of services at the Bundaberg Hospital—except for a \$1.5 million electrical upgrade—there are no new beds and there are no upgrades to the maternity service, which has to deal with another 350 births because of the closure of the private healthcare facility in Bundaberg. Bundaberg Hospital has five birthing suites, with only three operating at the moment. The hospital could reopen two of those birthing suites, because the number of births in Bundaberg Hospital has increased from 500 births per year to 850 births per year, which is placing an enormous strain on the maternity services. There is no enhancement of renal services at Bundaberg and no upgrade of staff accommodation.

Tabled paper: Copy of letter, dated 8 June 2006, from Jo Gillies to Mr Messenger regarding Manager, Miriam Vale Shire Council.

Time expired.