



Speech by

Hon. Desley Boyle

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

Hansard Friday, 8 June 2007

CLEAN COAL TECHNOLOGY SPECIAL AGREEMENT BILL; APPROPRIATION BILLS

Hon. D BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety) (3.59 pm): I rise to speak in support of the budget bills and inform the House of some of the benefits of the budget for my electorate of Cairns and some of the initiatives in my portfolio of Child Safety. For the people of Cairns, an increase of 12 per cent in funding statewide for hospitals and health and an additional \$528 million for hospital and community based mental health services is great news indeed. In the suburbs of Cairns, the level and the quality of services, particularly in the health field and most particularly mental health, have been of concern. So this increased funding is indeed great news.

For the people of Cairns, and for me as their local member, there is no higher priority than health. Therefore, I am particularly pleased by this much needed expansion. I have to say that there is also some specific money in the budget for Cairns Base Hospital in terms of improved oncology and cardiac services. This, too, will be welcomed. There is, however, only \$1 million in the budget for further building work at Cairns Base Hospital. Some people have questioned why that is so. I am pleased to inform the House that the reason that is so is that planning for an expansion of Cairns Base Hospital is underway at the moment. Until we know how much expansion we need and where that expansion will take place—whether in the form of new buildings on site or on another site—then we cannot do the budget documentation and go to Treasury to ask for those funds. Therefore, it is highly likely that the expansion moneys that will be needed for the further redevelopment of the Cairns Base Hospital will be reflected in the next budget rather than in this budget.

I have to say that the best kept secret in the budget is the huge boost it gives to public housing. With housing affordability being a real problem for so many people, an extra half a billion dollars for housing spread across the state will help. I will make sure that Cairns gets its fair share of both the increase in health and public housing funding.

The budget also includes a big boost to education. I have no doubt that the announcement of a laptop for every teacher will be welcomed as will the list of school-specific building and maintenance projects. Several of those are the \$2.16 million redevelopment of the Cairns campus of the Tropical North Queensland Institute of TAFE, \$1.4 million for Balaclava State School to complete the construction of a replacement amenities block, and \$1.97 million to Whitfield State School to complete the development of a general learning area block.

There is a lot of good news in the budget, but as a member who represents a regional electorate I make particular mention of the pleasing figures that show that 54 per cent of capital spending will occur outside south-east Queensland. I pay tribute to the Treasurer for managing that. Given the water infrastructure pressures in south-east Queensland, I would not have been entirely surprised if this balance in capital spending was changed. But I compliment the Treasurer on maintaining her clear recognition of the importance of development and infrastructure for all of Queensland, not just south-east Queensland.

There have been some comments in Cairns, particularly by the mayor of Cairns, that the budget is not very good for Cairns and the far north. He has persisted in the view that the money that has been

allocated to Cairns airport and Ergon should not be counted in the state budget and certainly should not be counted as government funding for Cairns. That is quite a peculiar position for him to take. These worthy organisations are government owned corporations. Particularly in terms of where those government owned corporations do work that has a public benefit, then it is of considerable interest to the shareholding ministers. None of these government owned corporations can proceed with work plans until they have received the approval of the shareholding ministers and, therefore, the government.

I think this issue is important, because the Cairns international terminal is probably the most important piece of economic infrastructure we have for our region. It is not simply a matter of it allowing some business travellers or family and friends to move in and out of Cairns; it is the underlying infrastructure that is essential to our tourism industry. Therefore, I think it is a great credit to my government that another \$120.7 million will be spent on the Cairns international terminal for the second year of the \$180 million four-year redevelopment of the domestic and international terminals at Cairns airport. To take these figures out of the budget announcements for Cairns and say, 'Well, it's been a lousy budget because you can't count that \$120 million' is not reasonable at all.

Work at the airport in the coming financial year—and I might say that Cairns airport is Australia's fifth busiest airport; a busier airport than some state capital city airports—will focus on expanding the baggage reclaiming hall and the retail areas of the international terminal, upgrading runways and aprons and installing better lighting, better surfaces, a new Australian Quarantine Inspection Service building and the redevelopment of the domestic terminal building. There is also an allocation of \$913,000 as a contribution towards the establishment of a technical and cabin crew base in Cairns in conjunction with Jetstar Airways through the Department of State Development. I welcome that. There is an allocation of \$8.86 million towards a new state-of-the-art rescue helicopter to be based in Cairns at a total cost of \$16.11 million.

Additionally, there is an allocation of \$5.62 million for the widening from four to six lanes of Mulgrave Road in Cairns between Ray Jones Drive and the Captain Cook Highway. There is an allocation of \$800,000 to complete stage 2 of the Cairns Centre of Contemporary Art at a total cost of \$1 million. I compliment the minister for public works, who is present in the House. There is an allocation of \$7 million in his budget for the commencement of stage 2 of the William McCormack Place office building in Sheridan Street, Cairns at a total cost of \$79.5 million.

Mr Schwarten: A good building, too.

Ms BOYLE: I take that interjection from the minister. It is an environmentally sustainable design and a building of which we are very proud. There is an allocation of \$750,000 to the Cairns City Council to assist with the botanic gardens redevelopment. There is an allocation of \$1.63 million towards the construction of an amenities facility and kiosk and the upgrade of existing facilities at Barlow Park, Cairns. There is an allocation of \$547,000 towards the redevelopment of Cazaly's Stadium, incorporating a lighting upgrade and additional seating and \$61.4 million towards replacing power transmission lines from Innisfail to Cairns.

What is missing in the budget is money for the Kuranda Range Road upgrade. Some Cairns people may be concerned about that. Even though there are some who are not in favour of that road upgrade, most of us are. We know it is a really important upgrade in order to open up the communities of the tablelands and to provide for the kind of population growth that we can expect in our region in the decades to come, particularly considering that Cairns is a narrow coastal strip. In such a precious environment, limited development can occur in a spreading suburban kind of way in the city of Cairns.

I particularly wanted to mention that the reason the Kuranda Range Road upgrade does not figure in the budget is that it still has not been approved by the federal government. In fact, the proposal has been with the federal government for a year for its consideration and approval in terms of its environmental impacts and design. The Wet Tropics Ministerial Council, of which I was previously the chair as environment minister, has given it the tick, but after a year the federal government cannot find the time to look at this important piece of infrastructure and give it the approval that it needs.

Until then, of course, as a state government we are not in a position to consider whether and how we will fund it. So I let the people of Cairns know that we sincerely hope that the federal government will be providing us with that approval and the news of the approval very soon. I hope it will not have to wait another five or six months for the federal election and be suddenly found in somebody's drawer in the week or two prior to the election. I hope that it does the job that should have been done some six months ago and give us that approval and give it to us soon. It is, after all, the business of the member for Leichhardt, Warren Entsch, who appears to have gone missing. He announced the Liberal candidate for Leichhardt some time ago and whenever there is business for Leichhardt it is she who speaks on his behalf. We have not seen Warren Entsch for a very long time and I am shocked that the media, whenever there are federal government stories, do not appear to contact him at all. Yet it is my information that for this remaining period of his term he remains on full pay with all his printing and other allowances and can therefore reasonably be expected to do the job right through to the very last day of this term of

government. One of the actions that he can take and take very soon is to get the approval for the Kuranda Range Road upgrade.

There are some marvellous initiatives, I am pleased to say as the Minister for Child Safety, that will be implemented through the Department of Child Safety beginning in this next year. I am aware, however, of the pressure on time, so I seek leave to have the remainder of this speech, particularly in relation to the Department of Child Safety initiatives, incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

In relation to my portfolio, the Department of Child Safety's 2007-08 budget has increased to \$551.3 million.

That's an increase of nearly \$50 million on last year and it's more than triple the budget allocated to child protection just four years ago.

The continued budget increases for my department show the Queensland Government's commitment to protecting children who are harmed or at risk of harm.

After years of massive change this is the first budget not centred on the sweeping reforms recommended by the Crime and Misconduct Commission.

With all 110 CMC recommendations implemented and a solid foundation in place we are moving from a period of intensive reform to a new phase of enhancing what we do.

We will now work on improving and refining existing practices and developing new and improved policies and services as we continue to strengthen child protection.

Evidence of this in our budget includes our new, \$12 million "One Chance at Childhood" initiative and our "safe houses" initiative for Indigenous children in remote communities.

Under our "One Chance at Childhood" initiative we will employ about 36 specialist staff to boost the protection of babies and toddlers in the child protection system.

We want to try to ensure that all children get a stable start in life as early as possible.

Recent scientific research has identified that chronic neglect and abuse over the early years of childhood can have permanent and debilitating long term physical and emotional effects.

Our message to neglectful parents is absolutely clear.

The government will give you intensive help but if you don't get your act together then your children will get their chance at a happy, stable, permanent home elsewhere.

We want to avoid situations where children "drift" from foster care to their parents and back to foster care.

Under this initiative specialist staff will intervene at three critical stages:

- When babies and toddlers enter the child protection system;
- When babies and toddlers are reunified with their parents; and
- When reunification fails and alternative homes must be found for babies and toddlers.

Early childhood officers will make sure parents of the most vulnerable babies and toddlers are linked in to the right support from other government departments and non-government agencies.

And they will also advise on expectant mothers who have come to our attention because there are risks to the health of the unborn baby.

Specialist reunification officers will focus on parents in situations where we have had to remove the baby or toddler.

These parents will receive intensive assistance and will be clearly told what measures must be in place before their child can be returned.

If, however, despite best efforts a child cannot be safely returned home then specialist permanent placement officers will step in.

These officers will secure a permanent home for the children including long term guardianship orders or adoption.

We will tread very carefully as these are important decisions.

The aim is to put the needs of the children first and to give babies and toddlers some stability in their young lives. After all, they only get one chance at childhood.

Mr Speaker, Indigenous children are overrepresented in the child protection system.

There are two major new initiatives to address this problem. The Child Safety budget includes funding to establish "safe houses" for children in remote Indigenous communities and for Child Safety officers to live closer to these communities.

\$19.1 million operating and \$15.5 million capital funding have been allocated to these initiatives.

We're taking a new approach with Cape York's Indigenous communities.

Until now Child Safety officers have flown in from Cairns for brief periods to carry out their work.

In cooperation with these communities we will establish accommodation and office space for Child Safety officers to operate out of branch offices in Weipa, Cooktown and Thursday Island so that they can live near the areas they serve.

In this way they can form closer ties and work in cooperation with Elders to strengthen child protection.

In terms of "safe houses" I expect to see the first of at least five established at Kowanyama and Doomadgee, where the councils had already offered land.

In the past day land has been offered at Pormpuraaw, and others will be set up at Aurukun and Weipa/Napranum, and another on Palm Island.

In addition, community consultation is planned with communities on Mornington Island, in the Torres Strait Islands and on Eastern Cape York to see what is needed there.

The "safe houses" are a result of consultation. They are what the communities want.

They will give children a temporary place to stay within their communities when they have been harmed at home and their longer-term needs are being assessed.

That keeps kids close to their extended families and friends, which makes it easier to get everyone involved in a solution to keep them safe.

The "safe houses" will also provide longer-term residential care for children who are unable to return to their families.

We expect they will house four to six children and be staffed by community support workers, who will provide practical advice and intensive support to children and families.

The combination of "safe houses" and Child Safety staff living closer will help involve entire communities in keeping an eye on their kids ... child protection should be everyone's business.

Mr Speaker, this Budget acknowledges the important role that more than 3000 foster and kinship carers play in healing abused and at risk children.

In 2007-08, \$65.2 million will go directly to foster carers to help cover the costs of caring for children. This money will cover the new, increased allowances that came into effect earlier this year.

A further \$4.03 million will go directly to foster carers as high support needs allowances to help them care for children with disabilities or significant behavioural problems.

In all, \$287.7 million—more than half the Department's Budget—will go to community partners. This includes organisations that recruit and support foster carers, provide counselling for children who have been abused and Indigenous organisations that provide advice about Indigenous children in care.

Capital funding of more than \$36 million includes spending to extend the reach of child protection services and strengthen their presence in regional and remote communities.

Capital funding highlights in Child Safety's 2007-08 budget include:

- \$9.6 million to build or expand office accommodation to support a growing workforce across the State, including: a new Child Safety Service Centre to cover the Forest Lake/Centenary area; the completion of new centres at Woodridge, Caloundra and Nerang; the relocation of centres at Fortitude Valley and Roma and the relocation of the Cunnamulla branch office; the expansion of the Bundaberg centre; and planning for the relocation of the Rockhampton North and Thuringowa centres.
- \$6.4 million to establish therapeutic residential homes in Cairns, Townsville and South-East Queensland. These will be for children with complex behaviours or mental health issues, which often arise because of the abuse they have suffered.
- \$3.6 million for residential care homes to provide a wider variety of placements, for example, for large sibling groups, children with extreme disabilities or highly-complex needs. These will be in Mackay and on the Gold Coast and the Darling Downs.
- \$6.7 million for information technology, including an additional \$3.7 million for ongoing investment in the Integrated Client Management System which gives Child Safety officers instant access to state-wide records.

Capital funding will also continue the work of building and expanding offices to cater for our increased workforce, which has grown by 85 per cent since the new Department started.

Our Budget includes funds to hire more staff including:

- \$4.8 million to hire about 13 additional Child Safety officers, 29 additional Child Safety support officers and 16 additional court coordinators;
- \$4 million to hire 53 permanent record keeping officers to ensure accurate, up-to-date records to assist in child protection; and
- \$0.46 million for the upgrade of Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect (SCAN) coordinator positions to provide the level of expertise required and ensure the department is appropriately represented in complex case discussions.

We are determined to stay at the forefront of child protection practice and service delivery in Australia as we face another challenging year.

By June 2008 we anticipate having 7900 children in out-of-home care. During the 2007-08 financial year we expect to record about 73,500 concerns about a child's safety or wellbeing with an estimated 33,600 of these being notifications of suspected child abuse and neglect.

There remains an unacceptable level of parental neglect and abuse in this state.

Our budget shows we are committed to taking action by extending and strengthening child protection services across the state.

But in the end it is parents who must face up to their responsibilities to provide a safe and loving home for their children.