



Speech by

Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard Tuesday, 13 March 2007

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (8.29 pm): In rising to speak in the address-in-reply to the Governor, I acknowledge her excellent work and the dignity she brings to the role. She truly can make Queensland proud of the way that she conducts herself, and I think there is strong support across the parliament for the way that she does fulfil this very important role.

I have now been honoured to have been elected six times to this place, representing the Maroochydore electorate—an electorate which stretches from Yaroomba and Mount Coolumb in the north to Mooloolaba in the south. I am truly grateful for the support of my family and the many volunteers who have helped support me in my role. On election day alone we had more than a couple of hundred people helping. It is that sort of people power that makes all the difference because it is what binds your heart to a locality and I suppose makes doing the local work that you feel so strongly about worthwhile. Ultimately, I believe that if you cannot perform the duties and appreciate the role of the local member, which is to serve your constituents, you are not worthy of stepping up to a higher level. Whether one works at the local level or at higher levels of government, first and foremost it is the people one serves who are important.

Because of the tendency of state governments—and predominantly Labor governments—to run to early elections, I have faced six elections in 14 years. I am yet to be convinced that four-year terms are the answer to improved planning and performance of government, as the evidence does not show that that is the primary reason for poor standards. However, I believe that there is a stronger argument for parliamentary fixed terms, which would deliver the benefits of greater certainty for business and the wider community as well as improve readiness for the Electoral Commission staff. This would remove the temptation for governments calling an early election because it is politically convenient. I have no doubt that, because of the looming water crisis, Premier Peter Beattie decided to go to an election five months early. He was facing an election in February or March of this year, and he knew what south-east Queensland dam levels were likely to be. He knew that the truth would finally resonate in people's backyard barbecue discussions, that is, Queensland, and particularly Brisbane, were facing a water crisis due to government mismanagement.

I want to address the issue of water and the sickening incompetence of this government, which is now resulting in businesses closing down, people losing their jobs and aged Queenslanders having to lug buckets of water around their gardens to keep their precious plants alive. If the Wolffdene Dam had been built instead of being canned by a Labor state government, Brisbane would not be facing this water crisis. The Goss Labor government was in power and it canned the Wolffdene Dam. Kevin Rudd, the current federal opposition leader, was a key leader in that decision. If the alternative dams that Labor promised to replace Wolffdene had been constructed in a timely way, Brisbane would not be facing this water crisis.

It is part of the public record that years before the Labor Party did so, the coalition put up the case for a recycled water pipeline to carry water west to industry and agriculture, along with other sensible new water storage policies and initiatives. I believe that conservative politicians make the mistake of thinking that good policy and planning are enough to win elections. We analyse the problem and come up with a solution before it becomes a hot button issue. Water is a classic example of this, as is health. On the other hand, Labor cynically demonstrates that elections can be won with a lot of resources and good campaigns

that focus on a 24-hour media cycle, and by painting a vision of something attractive and just in reach rather than dealing with the tougher issues that loom over the horizon and that are far more pressing and important. That is exactly what has happened with the water crisis.

With few exceptions, all crises have a lead time. The water crisis that this state and south-east Queensland in particular are facing was not caused by global warming. It was caused by the seat warming of Labor politicians who, over the past eight or nine years, have failed to put in place the infrastructure that they were called on to provide. At the time of the election the taps were not running dry and so water was not a critical issue in the public realm, even though some of us were calling for things to be done because we knew they were the right things to do.

It is unfortunate and tragic that the things that are considered to be newsworthy today are critical, but could have been avoided. That is the case with the water situation and many other key service delivery areas of state governments. The early warning signals were there. Those of us who sounded the warning bells were met with a yawn or were told that we were scaremongering. I take no delight in saying that we were right. I wish that the government would take its responsibility seriously, rather than passing the buck as it is doing now. I will come back to the latest developments in how the state government is currently trying to pass the buck to local government.

The current water crisis was avoidable. If we look at the demographics of Queensland, we have a predictable growth rate. Each week, 1,200 to 1,500 people move to south-east Queensland. Knowing that, how could the government justify not putting in place the necessary water infrastructure? Yet that is exactly what this state Labor government has done. Now it is trying to implement water policies as a knee-jerk reaction that will cost two to three times as much as they would have done had they been built in time.

A few weeks ago, several coast members and I had an extraordinary briefing with the infrastructure department. We raised concerns about the one-way pipeline currently being constructed from the Sunshine Coast. The government is advertising that pipeline as a two-way pipeline, but we know that it will be one way because the pumping stations that would be required for it to function as a two-way line are not being constructed. When we asked what would happen if the water resources are run down well ahead of the capacity in the system on the Sunshine Coast, we were told, 'Don't worry, the state government has a just-in-time policy for water infrastructure.' Rather incredulously we realised the desperate situation faced by Brisbane and the rest of south-east Queensland, because the government does not do anything just in time. The bureaucrats told us that it was a just-in-time policy, because to build infrastructure too far ahead is too expensive. That is the most incompetent government policy that I have heard of.

South-east Queensland, Brisbane and the Sunshine Coast, which already has enough water capacity, are being told that they will have to pay two to three times the cost for their water because the government has not built the infrastructure in time; in fact, it has failed the timeliness test. Instead of saving costs by building the infrastructure in a timely way, the government has delayed. Now we have a situation of crisis with 24-hour construction, which equates to two to three times the cost of construction. That cost will be passed down the pipeline to the consumer. It is not a just-in-time policy; it is a just-so-incompetent policy. It is hard to believe that the government could foist this kind of planning on Queensland.

In terms of the northern interconnector pipeline, the Deputy Premier says that Sunshine Coast residents are selfish if they do not want to share their water. Like most people, we have no problem with sharing in a true emergency situation. That is not the issue. The problem we have is being asked to subsidise a one-way pipeline without being told when that pipeline might deliver a benefit back to the Sunshine Coast while, at the same time, having to pay for the growth that is occurring south of Brisbane and in Ipswich.

This government is promoting rampant growth in parts of the state where there is no water. That is this government's incompetent policy No. 2. The government is actually promoting higher levels of growth in areas where there is no infrastructure and no water, and it expects everybody else to pay two to three times the cost for their water to pay for that incompetence. That is making people very angry.

The government is talking about trying to keep costs down in the first few years. I wish to make a prediction. This government went to an election five months early to avoid the publication of water restrictions that are now making people so angry. I predict that after the next state election, if this government wins again, we will see a situation where the costs will go far higher than people have been led to believe because every step of the way people have been lied to about the water planning in this state. I am angry and so are Queenslanders.

In some areas, people have actually paid higher water rates so that certain infrastructure could be built, as their councils have done the right thing. But the state government is now saying, 'We want you to pay even more so that we can build a one-way pipeline to take water to the growth corridors in the southern areas of Brisbane.' That has happened because this government's plan is failing Queensland. We feel ripped off, and quite rightly, because people have been lied to and now they are realising that they will pay through the nose for what the government has foisted upon them. I do not think that they will believe any more lies from the government as it tries to pass the buck. The just-in-time policy is

incompetent and when bureaucrats from the infrastructure department try to defend it publicly, it is time for the government to hang its head in shame.

In regard to other issues to do with growth, I believe that there is a growing concern about the levels of density under the south-east Queensland plan and what this government has planned. I have already raised in this place my concerns about what the state government has put into the public arena for the Mooloolaba Spit on the Sunshine Coast. We are still waiting for a deputation to meet with the Premier. As I have said publicly, the Premier was given the benefit of the doubt, until proven otherwise, that he would actually listen to the people. It is not right to put 12-storey high-rise buildings on crown land in areas where there is no traffic capacity and without any proper traffic planning to, it appears, benefit the public purse. I believe we need to start considering appropriate population caps in areas where population growth is not sustainable. These are some of the things that I think we need to start debating about our future and a sustainable future.

What is the future for urban growth? I challenge this government to look at the issue of real, sustainable decentralisation. This is about putting the infrastructure into place in communities where they have the capacity to reasonably grow, where they need augmentation and infrastructure, but where they would still maintain a sense of community rather than building a 200-kilometre megacity, which is the way south-east Queensland is still going under the south-east Queensland plan.

We want to see fast trains—fast rail—to places such as Maryborough, Gympie, Toowoomba and other parts of this state. These are places where communities have a sense of identity and where there could be sustainable services and reliable hospitals and schools rather than this wall-to-wall densification in south-east Queensland that seems to be the plan that has been currently foisted upon us.

I believe this rampant approach to high growth in south-east Queensland with high density will fail. We need to look for other alternatives to ensure that there is affordable housing and good, proper planning that looks at Queensland as a whole rather than trying to plan one corner and saying to hell with the rest. We are still waiting for the Premier to come back to us regarding a deputation at Mooloolaba Spit.

I also want to raise the issue of roads because this is something similar to water infrastructure. The amount of money this government has invested in these areas has fallen off over a number of years until finally, after a significant infrastructure drought, it has had to spend some money. I am pleased that the money is being spent in my area. We have 32,000 to 44,000 vehicles per day on two-lane roads, which is about 10,000 vehicles a day over and above what there should be. Finally we are starting to see the duplication of the Maroochy River Bridge—this is something I have fought hard for—on the Sunshine Motorway as well as other duplications with the Maroochy Road upgrade. I am grateful to see these works underway. I believe that they should have happened in a more timely way, but they are underway, and I acknowledge that.

One of the concerns I have with this government's just-in-time policy is a lack of understanding that it needs to put additional capacity into the roadworks that are underway. Too many times, and I have the paperwork on this, the roadworks that the government is undertaking—and it is certainly the truth with Kunda Park, Maroochy and other parts of Queensland—has an 8- to 10-year horizon instead of a 20-year horizon. I believe a 20-year capacity should be a minimum standard.

We are seeing a lot of work occurring that has a very short capacity that will soon need to be replicated or upgraded again. If the government actually put in place the building blocks and the capacity within some of these roadworks, it would not have to do substantial work for another 20 years. That is something that, once again, does not fit the 24-hour media cycle, and most people in this place would be retired. But I think in 20 years time people will be asking: why did the government not put a good infrastructure planning regime into place? That is where I think public policy and the time frames of news diverge and create a poor situation for infrastructure investment.

With policing, we see a promise from the government to fulfil something that I have called for for some time, which is that the water police be shifted to the water on the Sunshine Coast. The water police are currently on a dry block at Kawana, but moves are underway to shift them to the Mooloolaba Spit. That is still underway. We are still to see the final outline of the combined facilities for government services on the end of the spit. However, I do acknowledge that is underway, and it is something that I welcome.

I will continue to advocate, however, for the establishment of police stations in communities that have populations of 10,000 to 12,000 people, such as Mooloolaba and the north shore of Maroochy River. I have raised that issue with the minister in relation to Mooloolaba and Pacific Paradise, and I will continue to do so.

The transit centre in Maroochy is something that I want to bring to the attention of the House because we have an increase in people using buses but, in fact, no capacity for people to catch those buses in all-weather situations. The Maroochy hub is at the Sunshine Plaza. We know the temporary bus upgrade has still not occurred, but the long-term upgrade to a full transit centre has still not been planned. I call on the transport minister to help resolve the need for an immediate upgrade to the bus station and to ensure that the land is set aside for a combined bus and rail terminus in Maroochy.

Speaking of rail, the coalition supported bringing rail forward by 10 years to the heart of Maroochydore. The Labor government has not committed to this. If it is serious about managing growth, it needs to put some of this infrastructure into the right places ahead of time so that people make the choices to actually use public transport rather than buying a second car.

If the government wants to address greenhouse gases and if it wants to have a vision that is more than about words and stale policy from the Beattie machine, put the infrastructure in place so that people will choose public transport ahead of cars because there is actually an effective network.

Government members interjected.

Miss SIMPSON: We need the state government to start investing in rail and passenger rail not only in Maroochydore but also in a number of other areas. The government needs to invest money if it is serious about addressing responsible urban growth, responsible decentralisation and supporting sustainable communities where people are not stuck in gridlock pumping out noxious fumes from their cars and probably fuming themselves while they wait in line to get to their destination.

Health services is something that is very close to my heart. I fought hard to get a commitment that the opposition made, which the government followed suit on, to have public cancer patients receive their radiation therapy treatment on the Sunshine Coast. Finally, a three-year-old election promise that the state government made has been fulfilled: it has signed contracts with the private provider to provide that service to public cancer patients, and that is welcome. That is something that I raised a number of years ago. We committed to it. If the government wants to pick up our policies and run with them, and they are good policies, we will support them, and that is one that I believe has been positive.

As to hospital capacity, 10 years is too long to wait for a new hospital on the Sunshine Coast when there is a need for beds today. I know that a new hospital will mean significant changes to the existing network. That in itself requires honest communication from the government so that people are involved and have a say about the responsible delivery of services. However, in fact, we have one of the busiest emergency hospitals in Queensland.

Brisbane members who have been yelling at me during my speech and objecting to what I have been saying about the need for responsible planning and good urban planning should understand that, when there is a hospital with hardworking staff who are actually in one of the busiest trauma hospitals in Queensland, they deserve help now. I am sick of seeing ambulances on the road. They have given up ramping up at Nambour Hospital. They are on the road doing the circuit between hospitals because of a lack of capacity. This is happening throughout the state, but it is particularly happening in my area. This hospital has one of the highest levels of trauma loadings in Queensland. It is a tertiary level emergency department. It carries a tertiary intensive level facility as well. It is not funded accordingly. We do appreciate the good work. We want to see new bed capacity well before 10 years time.

Time expired.