



Speech by

**Jason O'Brien**

**MEMBER FOR COOK**

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## **CLEAN COAL TECHNOLOGY SPECIAL AGREEMENT BILL; APPROPRIATION BILLS**

**Mr O'BRIEN** (Cook—ALP) (8.22 pm): It is a great pleasure to rise and support the state budget for 2007 and the three bills that are currently before the House. I have said a couple of times before, and I hope I get to say it a couple of more times, that the cost of providing services and infrastructure in a seat like Cook is much more difficult and much more complex than providing those services and infrastructure in other electorates. When you have over 30 disparate communities spread over an area the size of Victoria, the cost of putting in health clinics, schools, police stations and other services grows exponentially compared to when you provide those services in a city or a provincial city where there are much greater economies of scale.

The electorate of Cook always seems to get its fair share of the funding, especially since 1989, but the reality is that it costs a lot more to provide those services. This is a fact that seems to be lost on the federal government with its attempts to cut back funding to Queensland through the horizontal fiscal equalisation system of grants that the federal government provides to the states. It came under pressure from New South Wales and Victoria to cut back Queensland's share of funding to provide these services. In acquiescing to those demands it shows that it really does not understand the reality of providing services in rural and regional Queensland where, as I said, there are small towns spread over a wide area. It is simply not possible to provide schools in one location and expect young students to travel hundreds of kilometres to those schools or people to travel hundreds of kilometres to get to hospital facilities. That is something that the federal government needs to come to grips with when it does its own budget.

The state budget this year has provided a number of important allocations to the seat of Cook. Those people who have been in this place for as long as I have know that the thing I talk most about in this place is the Peninsula Development Road. That road is the lifeline of my electorate. It is the spine that runs up through Cape York Peninsula to provide access for the Indigenous communities in the electorate. It is important for getting economic products out, such as cattle, into the markets in Mareeba and Cairns. It is also important for getting tourists into the area efficiently and effectively so that they can enjoy the many pleasures that await them in Cape York Peninsula. This year the road has received fantastic support from the state government.

There are a number of improvements worth over \$10 million that will be undertaken on the Peninsula Development Road this year funded wholly and solely by the state government. It is important to note that this financial year the federal government has not committed any funds to the Peninsula Development Road or to the people of Cape York Peninsula. It has taken an election to see the federal government finally come to the table and commit to the Peninsula Development Road. Well over a year ago the Premier committed an additional \$10 million, on top of the \$10 million that we spend normally, to seal particular sections of the Peninsula Development Road north of Lakeland. That was a commitment that the Premier put on the table over a year ago waiting for the federal government to match that commitment. The federal government had been silent for well over a year in terms of matching that commitment and it is only the fact that we are in an election year and close to an election that it has finally

come to the table and decided to match that commitment that the Premier had had on the table for quite some time.

Its commitment, though belated, is welcome. It will see a very rough section of the road north of Lakeland sealed. It probably will not be able to be done this dry season, but certainly will be able to be done next dry season. It will be most welcome by motorists who use the Peninsula Development Road. I want to see the Peninsula Development Road sealed between Lakeland and Weipa. That is a distance of about 550 kilometres of road. There is probably 480 kilometres left to do. I hope to have it completed in my time in this House. It is certainly one of my personal goals. If we can get an ongoing commitment from the federal government that goal will be achievable.

The problem is that the federal government's piecemeal approach of just putting in money when it is electorally convenient means that an enormous amount of equipment has to be moved in and out of the area—graders, bulldozers, rollers and so on—and that is very expensive. Moving that equipment in and out of the area means that the ability to seal more road is lost. We need an ongoing commitment from the federal government to the sealing of that road so that we can plan ahead and capital is not being wasted by constantly moving equipment in and out of the area.

There are a number of other important initiatives. The child safety initiatives announced by Minister Boyle are fantastic. They will see Child Safety officers placed in the cape and on Thursday Island where they are needed. This is the first time those officers will actually be based on the ground. These officers perform a particularly difficult job. Taking children away from their parents is devastating for some families. It is particularly hard from a policy sense, but now that these officers are on the ground we will hopefully see a greater capacity for them to work with the families and the people. Also, we should hopefully see them being more proactive in their approach to child safety in the Cape York Peninsula and the Torres Strait.

I was very pleased to see the allocation towards a police plane in the Torres Strait which will also help service Cape York Peninsula. This is something that the Queensland Police Service has been calling for for some time.

**A government member** interjected.

**Mr O'BRIEN:** It is a fixed wing plane, yes. People do not realise that it is about 1,800 kilometres from Cairns to Bamaga and then there are another 300 or 400 kilometres of Australia left after that, and there are 17 inhabited islands in the Torres Strait. Getting police into those areas to service those people is difficult. My constituents complain that it takes police some time to get out there and deal with their complaints. With this resource now, hopefully those concerns can be addressed and the police will be much more proactive in their approach to policing in that area.

It is worth noting that there is a great deal of crime in that area between Bamaga and the Papua New Guinea border. There is an international border and there is one federal police officer in that area. It is no great secret that all sorts of things come down from Papua New Guinea into the Torres Strait and mainland Australia. The reality is that the Australian police are not doing enough to counter the contraband that is coming into Northern Australia from Papua New Guinea. They simply do not have the resources. The fact that the Queensland government has taken the step in this budget to put in this fixed wing aircraft certainly means that we are pulling our weight by providing policing services to the region.

I could talk all night and all day about the benefits in this budget for my electorate. There are benefits for education. Weipa in particular has received some capital works. Weipa is an expanding area; the mine in Weipa is expanding and other activities are seeing Weipa's community develop. There are tourism enterprises and fishing enterprises. A lot more young people and young families are moving into Weipa and we are keeping up with the facilities there.

We are building a new \$40 million hospital in Weipa to meet the demands of that growing community. We are putting new classrooms and facilities into the state school to meet the demands of those young families who are moving in. That school, the Western Cape College, is starting to advance those people who live in that region. Not long ago that school did not have any students who were OP eligible, but there are now students graduating from that school who are OP eligible, who are undertaking training and who are work ready for the mine and the wider workforce.

I do not intend to take up too much more of the House's time. I have issued media statements about the budget and I believe that is the best way to get most of the good news out about my electorate. I would certainly like to thank the Treasurer and the government for their continued support of the Cook electorate. I commend the bills to the House.