



Speech by

**Rosa Lee Long**

**MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS**

Hansard Thursday, 7 June 2007

---

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

**Ms LEE LONG** (Tablelands—ONP) (5.23 pm): I rise to speak in the cognate debate on the appropriation bills and the clean coal bill. The 2007-08 Queensland budget of some \$32 billion includes some positive projects in my electorate. These include new infrastructure, progress on existing projects and a range of statewide initiatives which will also benefit the tablelands.

Possibly the single largest new project for the tablelands in this budget is the planning for a massive upgrade at the Lotus Glen Correctional Facility which is expected to begin this financial year. The planning alone will cost an estimated \$3 million, which, I believe, is an indication of just how big this project will be when it is underway. Not only will this be a massive construction job for the tablelands but there will also be a significant number of jobs once the expansion has been completed.

There is also funding for two new fire stations—one at Malanda of \$600,000 and the other at Yungaburra of \$601,000. The existing stations are old and in poor condition and fall far short of current requirements. I thank the Minister for Emergency Services for his continued support for the tablelands.

I also take this opportunity to remind the minister of his commitment for a new fire station in Mareeba by 2012. I urge him to bring that date forward because the present station cannot cope with the large new engines stationed there and growing staff needs. More importantly is its location, near a T-junction on an increasingly busy main street. Every time a fire engine has to park in the station it has to reverse across two lanes of traffic right next to a T-junction with no trained stop and go personnel to control traffic. I am advised that there have already been a number of near misses and this spot is certainly an accident waiting to happen. I believe that there is a duty of care in this case.

Probably the only building in Atherton which still has tarpaulins over the roof due to damage from Cyclone Larry is the Atherton Fire Station. I understand that the whole roof needs to be replaced and this should be done urgently.

There is ongoing funding in this budget of \$700,000 for the early stages of the \$10.2 million project to build a new police station and watch-house at Mareeba. It will be good to see this project get underway, but a concern that has been put to me about this project is that the proposed new watch-house is no larger than the existing one, which is inadequate and already too small to cope with the current requirements let alone cater for future needs. Perhaps this could receive some consideration before works actually commence on the project. This is being done jointly with the new courthouse project to create a justice precinct. The courthouse has funding in this year's budget of \$3.808 million. The total project cost is \$5.3 million. This is a major project not just for Mareeba but for the entire tablelands area and we thank the ministers for their support.

With regard to education, there are budget allocations for my electorate. There is \$300,000 for the rectification of the Mareeba State School oval which will be welcome. There is also \$300,000 for the Malanda State School for replacement of soakage trenches and a new treatment plant and \$608,000 for

the Mareeba State High School for oval maintenance and completion of its covered stage assembly area. These are all very welcome and I thank the minister for this support.

I would like to mention that a number of high schools on the tablelands are working hard to better meet the future needs of their students by addressing vocational needs not only through TAFE but also by specialising in certain areas. The Ravenshoe High School has a dairy facility which has, for many years now, been able to teach its students not only the finer points of the dairying industry, such as animal husbandry, but also pasture management, water efficiency in irrigation, efficiency in the application of fertilisers, fencing and aspects involving machinery and so on. These are all extremely valuable skills being passed on to these students.

This budget should have enough flexibility to address the pressing need to replace Ravenshoe High School's dairy, which has been in use since about 1935. As members can imagine, it is badly in need of replacement. In the same vein, Malanda High School is aiming at developing a veterinary science stream, while Atherton High School is going down the engineering track. I believe it is to the credit of these schools that they are so proactive. I urge the minister to capitalise on the enthusiasm of these school communities and fund them appropriately. There will be a tremendous return on such an investment.

In the Budget Strategy and Outlook paper there is recognition of the need to ramp up vocational education and training. This is true, as there is an urgent need for trades training, including apprenticeships. We are not training anywhere near enough tradespeople across all trades. There need to be more incentives for qualified tradespeople to take on young apprentices. When an employer can get a \$4,000 subsidy for a 12-month traineeship as opposed to \$4,000 or \$5,000 for a four-year apprenticeship it is easy to see how unfair the system has become.

In the area of health, it is disappointing that there is very little by way of specific allocations for the tablelands in this budget. There is \$47,000 to complete an \$800,000 refurbishment at the Mareeba Hospital. That is the funding despite there being a number of needs on the Atherton Tableland which are becoming more and more pressing as time passes and as the population grows. These include the urgent need for a new hospital at Atherton. The existing one is decades past its use-by date. Some buildings are heading for a century in service, including the old morgue which has been in a disgraceful condition. Recent revamps and overhauls are simply bandaid solutions. The time has come for a large new facility with more doctor positions and better equipment which will in turn attract more specialists to the area.

The Health portfolio has increased in this budget by 12 per cent to \$7.15 billion. With a total figure of that magnitude, one would think that further funding could have come to the Tablelands electorate. This would have, for example, capitalised on Atherton Hospital's fortunate position regarding access to specialists. There are doctors in its local community who are qualified above and beyond what might be expected for a hospital of Atherton's size. It is one of the main reasons it has been able to serve such a strong role as a training hospital in cooperation with James Cook University. It is essential that this specialist level of service is protected and continued, and the time has come for that to take place via a new, more efficient, purpose-built facility. More immediately, a clear need has been identified for at least a four-slice scanner for diagnostic and other purposes. Also with the budget surplus the government should explain why it has not done more to address the growing problem of aged and frail patients occupying acute care beds in our hospitals. For example, the Herberton Hospital serves extremely well as an aged and frail care facility. I have urged the minister to fund its expansion so that the acute care beds in Cairns Base, Mareeba and Atherton hospitals which are occupied by people awaiting placement can actually be freed up.

Atherton will also share in funding of \$2 million over the next three years for an initiative aimed at nursing and allied healthcare staff working with elderly people accessing emergency departments at Atherton, Cairns and Mackay hospitals. This program is intended to boost the confidence of older people and their families in managing chronic health issues. In the Capital Statement Budget Paper No. 3 under renal services I note there is financial provision for a three-chair dialysis unit funded for the Redland Hospital at just \$200,000. A recent community campaign for a similar sized dialysis facility at Mareeba Hospital which raised more than \$160,000 from the community was advised by Queensland Health that it would not go ahead. This does not seem fair. In the Health MPS on page 1-38 there is discussion about health technology funding for which some \$53 million is allocated. Ophthalmic surgery at Mareeba was stopped after the health department refused to replace an \$80,000 machine. Surely in that \$53 million there is room to replace this device and restore ophthalmic surgery to the tablelands and once again take the burden off Cairns.

The difficulty caused by a lack of Australian trained doctors and other medical specialists continues. In the Health Ministerial Portfolio Statement details are given on page 1-10 about medical scholarships and additional medical graduates. While we have some overseas trained doctors who are helping to fill the acute shortfall, the only real long-term solution is to train more of our own youth in those vital fields. It is not only doctors who are in short supply but also public dentists. In Atherton the waiting list is in the order of seven years and in Mareeba it is around four years. That is horrific! In this budget the Innisfail Hospital, which services a large part of my electorate, is funded this year to the tune of \$3.67 million to complete its

\$41.7 million redevelopment. This redevelopment has been ongoing for some years now and it will be good to see it completed.

A major amount listed in the budget for roadworks is an allocation of some \$9.3 million to be spent this financial year on widening, to a minimum of an eight-metre sealed cap, of the Kennedy Highway south-west of Mount Garnet. There is a further amount of another \$1.5 million for work in the next financial year. The widening of this road is particularly important due to the growth of mining in the area, which has placed a much larger number of heavy transports, including triples, on to the road. Their size and weight means that it is physically difficult, if not impossible, for them to manoeuvre easily on a single-lane bitumen highway to make room for other traffic. This is enough of a problem for locals, but it is even worse for the increasing number of tourists from the south or overseas who often have caravans and have no familiarity with sharing narrow roads with extremely large heavy transports. For example, if a driver of an average sized four-by-four towing a caravan thinks that slowing down and pulling off the road to make way for a truck is difficult, try to imagine how much more difficult it is for a truck to do that—to slow down up to 100 tonnes or more of mass and to control up to three trailers stretching back 40 metres or so. The existing situation is reportedly causing many close shaves and a duty of care to widen the roads is badly needed for everyone's benefit, and I thank the minister for this funding.

Tablelanders are anxiously awaiting the start of construction work on the upgrade of the Kuranda Range Road which cannot happen soon enough, but we are still waiting months after the due date for the latest federal approvals. There is no question about the urgent need for this upgrade. It is needed to cope with the phenomenal growth rates of the far north, both in Cairns and on the tablelands. As Cyclone Larry demonstrated, an all-weather escape route from the coast is required, and this was then reinforced recently by the tsunami scare. Given the size of the Main Roads capital expenditure budget of \$3 billion, I would have liked to have seen further funding for a number of other important road projects which are also critical for my electorate. These projects include the completion of sealing of the Mareeba-Chillagoe Road, the completion of sealing of the Herberton-Irvinebank Road and the completion of sealing on the Upper Barron Road. Rural and regional areas are keen on taking up options such as cycling for as many transport needs as possible. However, on already narrow roads with rough edges, poor shoulders and increasing amounts of heavy traffic you are taking your life in your hands by trying to cycle from one town to the other. Additional cycle lanes would make this healthy green option a far more attractive option for many Tablelanders.

I now turn to public housing, an area where this year's budget includes \$500 million to build 1,700 new public housing units. This is an area which should never have reached the level of crisis which it is now at, and I urge the minister to recognise that public housing problems are especially acute in the tablelands and in the far north where some people are waiting up to eight years. There are the specific needs of the Indigenous Australians in my electorate and the needs of the wider community, both of which need to be addressed.

I now turn to areas of primary industries and fisheries. The budget allocation for DPI&F for 2007-08 is a paltry \$332.5 million. It is a 4.4 per cent increase over the previous year, but it is a pathetic level of investment in a part of our economy that produces a major portion of our export earnings. According to the latest prospectus update on the DPI&F web site from March this year, it indicates the estimated gross value of production for primary industries for 2006-07 at a massive \$10.62 billion. This is near enough to a third of the state's entire budget and is second only to the booming mining sector. Despite the impact of drought, Cyclone Larry, Cyclone Monica and corrupt international markets, our primary producers have increased production by two per cent. They are decent, hardworking Queenslanders who deserve much more support and respect than they are given. I also note that the budget papers include as a biosecurity case study the rapid response to sugarcane smut. It is a challenge to understand why this was used as a case study as it was an abysmal failure. Smut is now expected to affect the entire sugar industry and strip some \$400 million from the production of sugar over the next seven years, yet the department uses it as a case study into rapid response. That highlights how pathetic this government's support is for primary industries. Its entire departmental budget is less than the amount one industry will lose from a disease which this government was incapable of keeping out of Queensland.

Dairy farmers continue to leave the industry, mainly because the Dairyfarmers Organisation continues to pay them a pittance of around 32c per litre, which is equivalent to what they were being paid around 15 years ago but costs of course have increased far beyond 1992 levels. What wage earner would work today for 1992 wages? None, I dare say. Also detailed in the budget papers is a particular issue facing DPI&F which is the review of the east coast inshore fin fishery, including fisheries in the Torres Strait. This review will have widespread impacts on the availability of some of our most popular species of fish, including mackerel, and the impact will not be confined to trawler operators but will flow downstream to fish wholesalers, handlers, processors right through to the local fish and chip shops.

**Mr O'Brien** interjected.

**Ms LEE LONG:** We get our mackerel from up in the Torres Strait thank you very much, but not for too much longer I might add.

**Mr O'Brien:** Rubbish!

**Ms LEE LONG:** I was up in the Torres Strait just recently and I was going to have a fish and chip meal because I thought it was going to be local produce. I said, 'Is this caught locally?' They said, 'No, we import it from down south.' Can you believe that?

**Mr O'Brien:** Why didn't you catch your own?

**Ms LEE LONG:** I would have loved to have caught my own, but we just were not there long enough. I know that people in my electorate are concerned that many will be forced to use poorer quality, imported substitutes. I urge the minister to ensure that all Queenslanders and Queensland businesses do not suffer as a result of this review.

The Energy budget papers outline ongoing allocations of some \$10 million for a range of upgrades, minor works and modifications at Barron Gorge, Kareeya, Koombooloomba and Windy Hill power generation facilities. However, the desperate shortage of water and the resultant likely shortage in electricity generating capacity in the south-east has highlighted the longstanding hydro-electric generating options of the Tully-Millstream project. This project would produce some 500 to 600 megawatts of clean, green hydro-power that could be fed into the statewide grid, and there would be no need to burn one ounce of coal, clean or otherwise.

The potential of the tremendous rivers of the far north goes further than that, however. Members may be surprised to learn that hydrological, civil engineering and cost estimate works were carried out on a huge hydro-electric generation scheme on the mighty Herbert River way back in 1962. Since then, governments from both sides of politics have just dropped the ball. Instead, there is a never-ending appetite from the royalties delivered by the coal industry, despite its continual pouring of greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere. Indeed, we have just heard how our next baseload power station will, yet again, be coal fired, which will put more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

My electorate contains the Mareeba-Dimbulah Irrigation Area, which is fed by Tinaroo Dam. This year's budget includes an allocation of an ongoing \$798,000 to Sunwater for refurbished and enhanced water supply schemes.

The north has higher and more reliable rainfall and many large perennial rivers. Among those who support the climate change theory, there is an expectation that while we may get fewer rainy periods they will be more intense. The end result will be that we will remain the wettest part of the country. Whether that happens or whether our rains continue in their traditional patterns, we have a growing need for more dams. Fresh rain that runs into creeks and streams and straight out to sea does no-one any good. The lessons from the south-east are clear: catch it, store it, and use it wisely.

In that vein, I am glad to see work beginning on the Nullinga Dam study, which was announced in last year's budget. This project needs a commitment to construct. As Brisbane and surrounds have learnt, any delay in putting water storage in place can be catastrophic.

I welcome the development of the MaMu canopy walk in my electorate. As detailed in this year's budget papers, a \$10 million construction contract has been let and the first sod turned. This is another means of capitalising on the natural resources of the Tablelands electorate. This project is anticipated to bring an estimated 200,000 extra tourists annually up the Palmerston Highway and on to the Atherton Tableland.

In relation to Child Safety, the new offices in Atherton are now open. However, I have been advised that some areas of the tablelands that have high proportions of Indigenous families have special needs and require more intensive support. I urge the minister to examine the establishment of 'support spokes' from the service hub in Cairns.

In this year's budget there is funding of \$77,000 for the Mareeba Transition Centre. This is proving to be a success, with no adverse impact on the local community. The redevelopment of the Lake Eacham day use area is also listed in this year's budget, with \$562,000 allocated to complete the \$1.052 million project.

In this year's budget we have received significant commitments in some areas, but there is always a need for more funding across a range of needs.

With the time that I have left, I will briefly speak on the Clean Coal Technology Special Agreement Bill 2007. This bill is locking Queensland into an agreement based on a technology that does not exist to protect an industry that is pouring some \$1.5 billion in royalties into its coffers each year. It is of great concern to hear a government say that significant public money is to be spent coping with carbon emissions, greenhouse gases and global warming.

We are regulated and legislated in every aspect of our lives to try to save the planet from this supposed global warming. The same government that forces all of these impositions upon us then turns around and spends our money on keeping the coalmines open and the power station smoke stacks pumping.

Time expired.