



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

Hansard Thursday, 7 June 2007

CLEAN COAL TECHNOLOGY SPECIAL AGREEMENT BILL; APPROPRIATION BILLS

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (6.21 pm): In speaking to the Appropriation Bill 2007 and the Clean Coal Technology Special Agreement Bill, I can certainly say that this was no election budget for my electorate. However, we would have to welcome the \$7.15 billion to be injected into Queensland Health. Encouraging is the annual funding increase to the Royal Flying Doctor Service from \$16.5 million to \$29.3 million. Also encouraging is the investment of \$18.3 million over four years to fund five rural generalists—a type of specialist doctor able to carry out advanced skills such as delivering babies, administering anaesthetics and performing some surgery.

I would like to raise serious concerns regarding the closure of maternity services in Moranbah. It is unbelievable that a booming community with a population of over 10,000 that produces billions of dollars for the Queensland economy has lost its ability to deliver a critical part of health care for patients. In the last 18 months, the state government has denied local women the ability to have an uncomplicated delivery surrounded by their family in their local surroundings. We would like to know why the government has allowed it to get to this stage.

The greatest gift a family and a community can have is to welcome a newborn baby into this world. For the parents, it is unparalleled to anything else in their lives. Nothing in this world could measure the depth and joy that a newborn child brings to a family. The state government is denying local women the ability to have an uncomplicated delivery surrounded by their family in their local surroundings. It is unacceptable to compel pregnant women to travel hundreds of kilometres away from their home town to major coastal cities to give birth to their babies. This is an unnecessary financial burden. It puts personal strains on people and separates mothers from their families for periods of up to three weeks during a very precious time of their lives.

While we must understand it is not the mothers' fault that the maternity service in their home town has closed down, it is vitally important to recognise the financial strain on families who need to pay the cost of travel and motel expenses. These pregnant mothers are booked in to these motels and wait for periods of up to three weeks before giving birth, and these are uncomplicated pregnancies.

Many families are usually not informed or are completely unaware of the patient travel and motel subsidies they can claim for the time they are away. I believe it is paramount that at all times Queensland Health provides information packs to advise all patients of what they can claim to help alleviate the financial cost which is no fault of their own. Could members imagine the outcry in Brisbane if mums to be had to be separated from their family, travel hundreds of kilometres and stay in motels for up to three weeks before giving birth? So why should this burden be placed on Moranbah families?

This is a vital issue and needs to be rectified. I call on the Minister for Health to support the community of Moranbah, recognise that there has been no service for the past 20 months and provide funds out of the \$7.151 billion Queensland Health budget to restore maternity services in Moranbah. This is a very critical part of health care for us all.

Mr Finn: What do you want?

Mr KNUTH: The maternity service restored in Moranbah. There is no service now. It was closed down 20 months ago.

I also acknowledge that the state government finally increased the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme from 10c to 15c per kilometre. This still falls way short of the Nationals' commitment to increase the scheme to 30c per kilometre. The subsidy has been 10c per kilometre for the last 15 years. As fuel prices skyrocket, it is costing patients—especially the elderly—an arm and a leg to travel long distances. For all the red tape they go through to get access to the subsidies, they still get only a pittance.

I would like to acknowledge the extra funding for Disability Services, with a total operational budget of \$717 million, which is up 13.1 per cent from last year. This will help boost access to accommodation support and community services. However, we need to ensure that the funds are managed so that the net benefit to disabled Queenslanders is maximised and not lost through bureaucracy.

There are many families who are still struggling to get access to occupational therapists, speech therapists, social workers, respite care and available respite facilities. These are all so desperately needed. It is concerning that funding for respite services was less this year, down from \$80 million to \$56 million. This is a very important issue for the electorate of Charters Towers, which has one of the highest numbers of people with disabilities in this state.

In road funding, almost \$7.9 million was provided to upgrade the Gregory Development Road from Charters Towers to The Lynd Junction. While hoping for more funding, this is by far the biggest injection of funds ever to this dangerous section which is referred to as a death trap. The extra funding to this single-lane highway will no doubt help reduce the road risks and benefit the region.

Also welcome is another funding injection of \$5.9 million to upgrade the Flinders Highway between Torrens Creek and Hughenden. This funding should almost complete the worst section of this highway, which means that the highway from Townsville to Hughenden will be almost fully upgraded.

In education, Millchester State School received \$187,000 to complete construction of the play area. It was disappointing that there was no funding for teacher aides in prep classes. There is growing concern among teachers and parents about the lack of support provided to prep teachers who have to supervise and teach up to 25 young children with little or no assistance. I would like to welcome the \$112,000 to reseal the runway and install pilot-activated lighting at the Charters Towers airport.

I welcome a program developed by the Charters Towers police to divert young people from criminal and antisocial behaviour. The program is designed to help young people become involved with team sports. I support this, but I would like to bring to the attention of the House that the system in place now is not working and that this program and other stronger punishment regimes need to be put in place to distract juvenile criminals from committing crime.

Recently, juveniles appallingly smashed headstones at the Charters Towers cemetery. This caused distress and shock across the town, especially in families who had the graves of loved ones violated. This kind of senseless destruction and vandalism was almost unheard of in previous generations, and this generation has to find the voice and backbone to stand up and say, 'We will not tolerate this kind of devastation.' Pussyfooting will never arrest this behaviour. Each destroyed headstone represented a life—someone's wife, husband, grandmother, grandfather or friend, someone who lived and died in our community. Each headstone also represented a significant chunk of local history which can never be rewritten or relived. History must be honoured and preserved, and each generation has a responsibility to pass on the heritage of the past to succeeding generations.

There is a rising demand in our community for outbreaks of vandalism to be dealt with severely. I ask that incidents such as this vandalism be viewed not as minor crime but as serious crime and that the perpetrators be forced to face the full extent of their actions. Just a few years ago, within a three-month period there were 223 offences committed in Charters Towers, with 68 offenders charged only to receive a slap on the wrist. There are reports of children as young as 10 roaming the streets late at night in Charters Towers. Put simply, having these children roaming the streets at night is a recipe for disaster. Residents are sick and tired of their cars being smashed, their homes being entered and shop windows being smashed and spat on. It is time the government stopped ignoring this problem because these young criminals are becoming more and more brazen in their acts of theft, wilful damage and violence. They have no respect for the law or authority.

I am not talking about kids out at night watching a movie. I am talking about juveniles who are breaking into homes and terrorising people and who are out there to deliberately inflict and cause serious bodily harm on other people. Our communities have lost their right to feel safe in their own homes. It has got to the stage where people will begin taking the law into their own hands and they are the ones who will inevitably end up being sent to jail. I call on the state government to take action and do something about

the crime problem. Through the police minister, I call on the government to provide more police on the beat to combat crime and introduce stronger laws to ensure an ongoing crackdown on youth gangs.

We need to investigate the Cleveland detention centre. It is known as 'Camp Cleveland' because it provides good food, games and new track shoes. Spending time there is regarded as a badge of honour amongst gangs. The Cleveland detention centre should be a deterrent for juvenile offenders. However, this centre has become a place where juveniles are prepared to steal and destroy property, become public nuisances and inflict serious bodily harm on people to get into it.

I believe there is too much pandering to non-productive groups, the do-gooders and the bleeding heart brigade. The only way to stamp out juvenile crime is to add to the programs we have in place and introduce American-style boot camps and the shaming column in newspapers where juveniles who commit a crime have their faces splattered over the newspapers. Members may feel this is a little harsh, but they would not think that if these criminals committed a crime against them. Residents need a guarantee from the state government.

I seek leave to incorporate the rest of this speech and my speech on the Clean Coal Technology Special Agreement Bill in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

It was disappointing that little funding was made available to seal the Hughenden to Lynd Road or Kennedy Development road the Kennedy Development road, the road that the media have called the worst road in Australia".

We keep hearing this myth that that because limited number people use this road it does not justify an upgrade".

Mr Speaker this is a Myth. If the government had the foresight or vision to seal the Kennedy Development road, it would open up the west for transport to southern markets increase tourism and the safety of the residents in this region?

Hundreds of thousands of cattle were to be trucked out of this area last year and the road condition is deteriorating.

This road of regional significance, it is the future inland highway from Cairns to Melbourne and a north-south link from the Atherton Tablelands to Hughenden and centres south and west.

It will alleviate traffic congestion on the coastal routes, provide increase tourism, economic benefits for transport companies open up southern market. breath life into communities and help alleviate the infrastructures problem the South east corner face from large influx of people moving into the area each month.

The significance of the Porcupine George alone gives good reason the government should consider this a priority.

Mr Speaker the Cairns and Hughenden Chamber of Commerce the Richmond and Flinders Shire Councils and the general public are behind this project and are calling on this Government to seal this road.

Mr Speaker in speaking to the Clean Coal Technology Special Agreement Bill 2007 I commend initiatives to look at all opportunities for clean coal technology as Queensland is the world's largest exporter of coal and coal is our most important export commodity.

Last year Qld produced over 226 million tonnes of coal from 43 open cut and underground mines earning almost \$18 billion in export revenue. At least \$1.5 billion are paid in royalties to the Queensland Government.

The coal industry directly employs over 13,000 people, with many more thousands employed by services supporting the coal industry.

This bill will establish the representation and the functions of a clean coal council. Basically it will allow the council to make recommendations to the Premier on the allocation for the research, development and demonstration of clean coal technologies.

The questions for the Premier that need to be addressed are:

1. What has happened to the Clean Coal Technology Board
2. Why have they not reported publicly
3. What were the recommendations of the Clean Coal Technology Board regarding ZeroGen?
4. What is the difference between the two bodies

What is also important To ensure transparency and accountability in regard to the decisions the Premier makes, regarding Council recommendations and the Premier's resultant decisions.

All advice, assessments, recommendations and reports of the Clean Coal Council to the Premier and his Department should be tabled in the Parliament within 30 days of their delivery to the Premier and/or his Department or other Minister as he may delegate.

The Coalition believes that the best opportunities for the development of clean coal technology should be explored and I hope the council will not have to make recommendations that pander to the Premiers ego.

It is perhaps ironic that the Premier is pushing through this bill in an attempt to be seen to be doing something while crisis after crisis threatens the coal industry.

It is disappointing that at a time of record demand for coal exports, inefficiencies in Queensland Rail means we are exporting less coal than two years ago and in the process losing royalties of at least \$150 million per year based on royalties of \$8 to \$10 per tonne.

While I acknowledge and support clean coal technology we must also be very careful that an industry that provides billion to our local economy is not place in jeopardy by chasing shadows and possible myths especially if the initiative of clean coal technology in the end proves to fail.

There seems to be a competition going on amongst members of 'the global warming industry and environmentalist' to see who can make the most outlandish doomsday statements.

According to a top level report prepared by former World Bank chief economist Sir Nicholas Stern, the Earth in the next 50 years "will experience floods, famine, mass migration s and the destruction of species if the Earth's temperature continues to rise which will result to the lose of agricultural land, reduced power generating ability and plummeting rainfalls droughts,.

All this they says is the result of human activity by our burning of fossil fuels (coal, oil, gasoline) which they say produce greenhouse gases.

But Mr Speaker I would like to no what caused all the deserts like the Sahara, Kalahari and the Gobi and Simpson plus the drying up of Lake Eyre. They cannot blame the industrial revolution on this one.

Also doomsayers predict that the Greenland glacier plus the polar caps and polar ice will melt due to global warming.

"This will raise sea levels about 6m causing widespread coastal flooding. But they don't mention the million of gallons of water flowing and flooding every day in the oceans from the millions of creeks and rivers around the world.

The Amazon alone pumps into the sea a million gallons every second and the fresh water can be drunk 200 miles out to sea and much of this water comes from the ice capped mountains yet the sea levels still does do not rise.

Eric the red

Then there was the "hole" in the Ozone layer caused, they say, by refrigeration gases aerosol cans and some scientists even blamed the cows'

Yet the interesting the "hole" was never over countries that use these products?

While some of these scientists and environments blame many for greenhouse gases they avoid any mention of the pollution from volcanoes and out of control bush fires.

The latest catch phrase is from intergovernmental ICCP report that unless greenhouse gas emissions are reduced, biodiversity within the Great Barrier Reef will be drastically reduced within 20 years.

Just on the local news recently representatives of the conservation movement not happy with john Howard's policy on climate change and green house gas emission stated the Great Barrier Reef within the next 10 years will be in dire straight. What a load of rubbish.

I will read you the words One of the world's leading tropical coral reef scientists, Townsville-based Dr Walter Starck (who has been studying coral reefs for more than 50 years and the GBR for the past 30), stated in a paper published by the Institute of Public Affairs a year or two ago, that the big problem with the GBR was that it was largely inaccessible, it is underwater and it is vast: 'So anyone can claim anything and who's to know the difference?'

He went on to state the most likely effect of a rise in water temperature would be to expand the area suitable for coral growth, southwards.

It would also cause weaker El Nino patterns and less coral bleaching (you can find his paper on the Institute's web site: ipa.org.au and search for it by author).

The Reef

Mr Speaker in acknowledging the value of our great Coal Industry and the push for clean coal technologies and the further need to meet electricity demand.

There are many Warnings of coming demand/supply imbalance and urgent need for a base load power station in north Queensland.

It is really time this government stops talking the talk and build the thing.

Mineral development and investment in North and Western Queensland have been put on hold because of lack of reliable power sources. And the further you transmit power the more cost are associated with that transmission.

It is logical to identify Pentland as the alternative sight for a base load power station.

"Major stakeholders have already done extensive investigations into the feasibility of building a power station at Pentland, including a \$2 million drilling program completed by the Owners of the Pentland coal reserves Xstrata who confirmed the ore body is a good enough quality for an economically viable 600-800MW power station for the next 35-40 years.

This site "It is commonsense as we have one of the biggest river systems in Queensland with a plentiful supply of water, a nearby rail facility, a rural environment, and a potential power station that sits on unlimited coal reserves and Pentland is a vital link to North and Western Queensland.

This proposal has the support of Federal and State Members, Charters Towers Chamber of Commerce, City and Shire Councils, Townsville Enterprise, visitors and investors.