



Speech by

## Vaughan Johnson

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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

**Mr JOHNSON** (Gregory—NPA) (7.30 pm): I rise to speak in the cognate debate on the appropriation bills. I say from the outset that it is a very interesting budget. The government has stuck its neck out to borrow \$14 billion to undertake capital works. It is a wonderful program, but we need to look at the ramifications down the line.

Thank God we have a federal government in power at the moment that certainly has the management strategy of this country right. Huge dollars are flowing to the states through GST payments. The GST has been a wonderful asset to the economy of the nation as a whole rather than just to the economy of Queensland.

There are many aspects of the bills before the House that I want to touch on. Huge amounts of infrastructure will be put in place in the south-east corner of the state. No-one denies we need it. We thank the Lord for the good rain we have had over the last 24, 48, 72 hours. I make the point though that we certainly need a lot more before pressure is taken off the water infrastructure and water grid issue.

I think we all recognise and understand that the government has huge pressure on it in relation to water. At the same time, poor planning can create the environment that we are in now. There is no doubt that there has been poor planning. As many speakers on this side of the House have said, this is why the government is in the predicament it is in in relation to the \$9 billion water infrastructure program.

As the Leader of the Opposition rightly said this morning, there are issues in relation to the contracts that have been let for the pipelines, the way the pipelines have been built, the carriage of materials et cetera. The machinery, plant operators et cetera—and we know this from the mining boom in this state—are a big cost factor. That type of heavy construction taps into our talented pool of resources, our tradespeople. That is a problem we face right across Queensland at the moment. In the area I represent we are losing people out of our industries. They are going to the mines. We cannot take that away from them. At the same time, we have to give people opportunities.

Last week my colleague the member for Mirani and I visited the Hay Point-Dalrymple Bay coal terminal, which is in the member's electorate just south of Mackay, and also the Jilalan rail yards. We saw the problems that the coal industry is confronted with. It is all very well to blame our overseas trading partners and say that they have to be patient with us getting the coal out. We certainly have to do some planning in terms of getting that coal out. This is a multibillion-dollar industry. It is a \$17 billion industry. This government reaps \$1.5 billion dollars a year in royalties out of the industry. Look at the wealth that that area of Queensland has generated and will continue to generate probably over the next 100 or 200 years. That brings me back to the issue of Queensland Rail.

There are 22 rail sets that carry that coal into the port of Dalrymple Bay-Hay Point. I urge the Minister for Transport and Main Roads and the Treasurer, as the shareholding minister, to look at the situation concerning QR. There are anomalies that are affecting the carriage of the goods in question—and

here we are talking about coal—to the port of Dalrymple Bay-Hay Point, the port of Gladstone and the port at Abbot Point. I will talk more about Abbot Point later.

We cannot tolerate this situation. A train went into Hay Point-Dalrymple Bay recently with 70 empty wagons. Those trains usually have about 102 wagons. The reason was that the coal at the mine was damp and could not be loaded in the scheduled time. When they have schedules to meet the train has to move on. I support the Premier's proposal for a joint industry-government inquiry into how to correct some of these anomalies. At the same time, Queensland Rail management has to take control of the agenda and make certain that these wagons going to the coal dumps on the coast are not empty. We have to turn that situation around. It is absolutely ludicrous to think that that is happening. BMA and Babcock and Brown are trying to do great work at Hay Point and Dalrymple Bay. At the end of the day, we have to have industry working with industry and government working with industry to make certain we maximise the outcome for the industry.

I urge the government as a whole to look at the future of Queensland and have a vision for how we can grow north Queensland in general and in particular the region in question. The emphasis over a long period has been the south-east corner. Everything has happened in the south-east corner. We know the capital is here. We know the Gold Coast is here. We know the Sunshine Coast is here. Toowoomba is not far away. It is 120 kilometres to the west. It is a regional city and a very integral part of the economy of south-east Queensland and western and north-western Queensland. For all the years I have lived in the west—Quilpie and now Longreach—I have done my business in Toowoomba. This is where I saw accountants, solicitors and whoever else. We educated our children there because it is the regional centre for people in the west. It is a very big regional centre.

There has been too much emphasis put on people wanting to live in the south-east corner. I think that culture has to change. I urge the government to have the vision to change that. Along the coast there are plenty of places where people can live. They are great places. Even the inland areas like where I live are great places to live. The federal government has to play a big role in this, too, through taxation incentives. What I mean by taxation incentives is encouraging businesses to go into those regions and encouraging people to go to them and take their families there. They can educate their children there. I am talking about places like Longreach, Mount Isa, Cloncurry, Charters Towers, Biloela, Charleville, Blackall, Barcardine, Kingaroy—as close in as that—and the list goes on. They have high schools and hospitals, and they are damn good places to live and rear a family and get ahead.

It is important to look to the future—the next 20, 30, 40, 50 years. A lot of us are not going to be around then, but I think we are acting irresponsibly if we do not look to the future and consider how we leave this place for our children and our grandchildren so that they can enjoy an economy and a quality of life that many of us hope they will have. A long time ago when Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen and Lang Hancock were in positions of power in Queensland and Western Australia there was talk of a railway line across the top end between Port Hedland and Townsville.

That railway line would be a wonderful idea. There has been talk about a north-south railway line from Melbourne to the port of Gladstone and out through Mount Isa to Darwin. When I was Queensland's minister for transport and main roads I opposed that railway line between Alice Springs and Darwin because I did not think that it would be of significant importance to that part of Australia and I questioned what its freight would be. In terms of the amount of money injected into it and the number of trains that run on it, I think those questions are still being asked. But I think it is before its time. When one looks at the rich resources of Western Australia and Queensland, there is coal on this side and iron ore on the other side and both have low populations in the north—Western Australia certainly has low populations in the north—but in north Queensland there are beautiful places where people can live. There are many good cities and towns along the coast which are adjacent to industries. One only has to look at the opportunities that exist in Townsville, but many people do not realise the untapped capabilities of Townsville in terms of what is happening there.

**Mr Wallace:** And good people, too!

**Mr JOHNSON:** We will not go there. This is serious business that we are talking about and the responsible thing to do is to engage, to embrace and to take people with us in order to think outside the square. I do not say this lightly: I urge the Treasurer, I urge the Premier, I urge the Queensland government and I urge all members of this parliament to show some leadership to bring about some of that change.

Earlier today the Premier introduced the Cape York Peninsula Heritage Bill 2007. That is a wonderful initiative in many ways. It is about engaging the Indigenous people in north Queensland. For many years we have heard how we have failed Indigenous people. It is now our opportunity to engage those people and engage the whole of north Australia to start making a difference, because that is what we are lacking in this country—that is, making a difference. That is north Australia, and north Queensland is a part of north Australia. I look forward to debating the legislation introduced by the Premier today when it comes before the House, because there have been many injustices in the past in relation to Indigenous

people. At the same time it is now our opportunity to right some of those injustices and take those people with us. That is why I am saying we need to develop infrastructure in north Queensland.

With regard to the huge infrastructure package that the Deputy Premier announced in the House on Tuesday, I am a firm believer that if we are going to develop anything there has to be infrastructure to go with it. However, there has to be responsible spending, responsible input into policy and we have to ensure that we cross our t's and dot our i's when it comes to the bottom line—the adding up and the subtraction. I know that the interest bill will keep rising and by 2010 it will be about \$1.14 billion, but it is important to build that infrastructure in north Queensland and the associated infrastructure in order to take the burden off the resources in the south-east corner. Every day we hear the minister for transport say that there will be another multibillion-dollar road built somewhere to move people through Brisbane or outside Brisbane such as western bypasses and the like. Yes, that has to be done. However, at the same time we need to put incentives in place in order to encourage some of the population to move into places such as my electorate and further north in Queensland in order to spread the population. We are a diversified state and I think it is about time we started to recognise the importance, the roles and the responsibilities we have as politicians and elected representatives of the people to put good policies and vision in place.

During debates such as this we hear all members in the parliament talk about their own electorates and the issues that are failing in their electorates which have to be addressed. In that regard, the minister for education has \$77 million in the budget over the next four years to give each teacher in the state school system a laptop computer. Nobody disagrees with trying to improve resources in schools, but about 25 per cent or 30 per cent of children in our state are educated in the Catholic system or the private system. As responsible leaders and a responsible government we have to look at getting computers into some of those private schools, especially those smaller private primary schools. The Catholic Church has done great work over a long period of time in educating children in remote areas and other parts of the state. I myself am a product of a Catholic convent in Quilpie where I spent my early days, and that convent is still going.

**Mr Malone:** I bet they belted you, too!

**Mr JOHNSON:** By geez they did belt me, but I am not too bad a bloke though, am I?

When I was minister for transport there were many old computers left over in government departments, and this happens in every government agency. I say to the member for Thuringowa and minister for natural resources that many of those computers are stacked away in rooms and are not utilised properly. Those computers could go into those places or to Indigenous communities or to those smaller schools that do not have those resources. They are of no value elsewhere, but they can be utilised in a responsible way. At the ICPA conference in Mount Isa last year—and the honourable member for Mount Isa is in the House and no doubt she will agree—I raised the issue of those computers.

The other issue I want to touch on tonight relates to biosecurity, and I note that the budget contains \$82 million for biosecurity. This is a very important function of government today and something that is paramount if we are going to be genuine about protecting the farmers and graziers of not only our state but also our country. On 1 July—a couple of weeks away—the 2PH organisation at Emerald, the Pressler family, will start again by planting the first of 250,000 trees that were removed because of citrus canker. Those 180,000 trees that they will start planting on 1 July are the beginning of the most sophisticated, upmarket and high-tech horticulture orchard in the world. John Pressler tells me that even the fertiliser will be put through the watering system so that the trees all get even amounts of fertiliser at the appropriate times. We have to think about things a bit, but out of everything bad comes something good. All I can say is that I hope that the Pressler family and the other orchardists at Emerald will never again be subjected to the trauma, the hurt and the anger that arose because of that situation, as well as the townspeople and the couple of thousand people who move through there each year to pick fruit.

The federal government through AQIS has a big role to play when we talk about biosecurity, and I have spoken to the minister for primary industries about this. In that regard, I refer also to stock inspection services, especially at Alpha where there is talk about having a full-time stock inspector. Many people do not realise the importance of this issue in terms of the tick line. During the dry seasons ticks are not going to move, but we need inspectors there to keep an eye on things in terms of scratching cattle when people want to move cattle through there. There will always be the person who will run the gauntlet and think, 'There's nobody here so we'll move through the line,' in order to move those cattle somewhere else. What happens then? If there is a wet season the tick line will move south and move west and that will only devalue our great livestock industry. As I was saying, we do not want instances like the citrus canker outbreak at Emerald to occur again because of the huge costs, the huge imposts and the worry that the citrus industry had to endure during that time a few years ago.

Another issue that I want to touch on this evening is the Flying Doctor Service, which has been allocated \$3.2 million in the budget. My colleague the member for Mount Isa is in the House and probably other members in this House have also had something to do the flying doctors over a period. I certainly

have. Only three weeks ago, one of my little granddaughters suffered a fractured skull and was flown to Townsville by the flying doctors.

The most sacred thing we in the bush have is the Flying Doctor Service, and what a great service it is. I thank the government and the minister for that \$3.2 million. I say to everybody in the House this evening: the flying doctors, the flying obstetricians and the flying surgeons provide the most sacred service we in this state can have. In some places people can only dream of such medical services, especially those provided by the flying obstetricians and flying gynaecologists. Right across the state, our women can access those professional services, as well as services provided by flying paediatricians, ophthalmologists, gastroenterologists and other specialists who come out from Brisbane and the coast. I say to the Minister for Health that it is absolutely paramount that we keep those services operational. It is also important that we make certain that they are enhanced.

I thank the Minister for Police and Corrective Services for coming to Longreach last week and saying that she will upgrade the Longreach Police Station. I am also grateful for the \$5 million allocated to the upgrade and replacement of the Charleville Police Station. I hope that, in a short while, the minister will see fit to fund a full replacement of the Longreach Police Station.

Time expired.