



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

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APPROPRIATION BILLS; REVENUE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (4.07 pm): In response to the 2008-09 budget, Queensland is without a doubt the lucky state. The state government has been able to paint the town red with massive revenue from an economic boom due to increased property prices, huge royalties from the mining boom, GST revenue, increased land rent, taxes on bores, higher water charges, increased boat registration, ambulance tax, stamp duties and the list goes on. Despite all the additional revenue, the people of Queensland are questioning where all the money has gone.

Under the previous Bjelke-Petersen government we boasted of the world's best health system and infrastructure development—the cranes moving the equipment. Roads were built, power stations were built and water infrastructure was put in place. We had a government with vision and without debt and 20 years ahead of its time. Now after 19 years the Labor government has achieved a \$59 billion debt, costing Queenslanders \$10 million a day in interest payments. This is a result of this government's ideology to ride on the back of what Joh built and put in place rather than investing in infrastructure with its 'no new dams, new power stations' policy coupled with the removal of hospital boards.

This policy has created the health, energy and water crises. This government has no other choice but to borrow to fix these crises and now we are paying \$10 million a day in interest. There is a lot to be done and I note that the minister boasts of the injection of the \$8.35 billion to fix the health crisis. This is welcome. However, if the government embraced two of the coalition's election commitments there would be no health crisis. One is to provide the framework to ensure that all nurses in Queensland will do a large part of their training in hospitals, not just universities. This will ensure that the nurses will get hands-on practical training from day one and will solve the problem of nurse shortages.

Most importantly, we need to reinstate local hospital boards made up of nursing, medical and hospital staff and members of the local community, not Brisbane based bureaucrats who do not have a clue about how hospitals operate especially in rural and regional areas.

I am pleased to hear the announcement by the opposition leader that a Springborg-led government will provide \$120 million to an alternative energy fund for a new scheme where Queenslanders will be paid for every kilowatt of solar energy they produce. The scheme would pay a gross feed-in tariff for all owners of solar energy systems, ensuring that everyone who contributes power to the grid is paid 44c per kilowatt. What this means is that, if you have solar panels on your roof and create excess electricity, you will be paid enough to cover the costs of the panels over 15 years.

It was also disappointing that there was no increase in the Patient Transport Subsidy Scheme. This is an ongoing issue and has been raised numerous times through petitions and by other members of parliament. The subsidy is still only 15c per kilometre and has only been raised once in 15 years. As fuel prices keep rising and we continually see more and more health services removed, patients are travelling further and further and more frequently to access health services that were once provided in their home towns. It is costing patients, especially the elderly, an arm and a leg to travel these distances, and for all the red tape they go through to get access to the subsidies what they get back is only a pittance.

I am pleased to learn that this government has embraced the coalition's election commitment during the last election campaign to remove stamp duty on all property transfers which will give ordinary mums and dads the incentive to purchase their own home. However, I do believe that the first home buyers grant needs to be raised to \$10,000, especially since over the last five years Queensland's share of GST revenue has soared by 63 per cent, topping the \$7 billion mark.

The state government has revealed that the registration of tinnies up to 4.5 metres will rise to \$50.35, up \$15, while owners of 20-metre plus craft will pay \$598—an extra \$360. It is disappointing to see the increase in trailer registration for recreational fishers. This is disappointing as this government does little to provide support to recreational anglers. The recreational fishing industry has become so overregulated and underfunded that many fishers are questioning why they pay for boat and trailer registrations, other than financing the government's bureaucratic policing of the industry. For example, the greater Townsville district alone hands the state government a few million a year through boat and trailer registration fees, and what has it seen in return? There has been virtually nothing done to improve parking facilities or widening of current boat ramps for at least 10 years.

Recreational fishers have to contend with overcrowded ramps, often with no means of parking, and many are being forced to park illegally. What do recreational fishers receive in return for registering their boats? They are not even covered by third party in the event of an accident on the water. Currently Queensland fishers are now coming under review in the form of more regulations for the inshore finfishery. People are saying that the industry is so besieged by regulations that many recreational fishers are gripped by fear when they see marine park or DPI fisheries vessels approaching. It has come to the point that you need a masters in law to know whether you are committing some kind of offence or not. Fishers from my electorate are telling me that it is hard enough for someone on the coast who fishes regularly to try to keep up with all of these new regulations. However, for us north-westerners who may come to the coast occasionally fishing with the family, it is becoming all too confusing.

The state Labor government claims that many of its new and past regulations have come about from its many consultancy meetings held to seek recreational fishers' views and input for the benefit and sustainability of the industry. However, these meetings have been receiving poor attendance from the majority of fishers due to a handful of the same self-interested individuals who coincidentally always seems to get the attention of ministers' advisers, while anyone having a different view is simply ignored. Fishers do not need any more fees and regulations. Even cutting back on some of the ridiculous, unneeded and unworkable ones would be a move towards reasoning.

What we are not seeing is a proactive approach to the industry by responsibly utilising boat and trailer fees by funding the implementation of the already successfully proven artificial reefs along our inshore coastline. Fishers are crying out for more all-tidal access points with quality four-bay boat ramps, toilets, washdown areas, security cameras and better parking facilities all shrouded in a more common-sense approach to the whole industry. Equally, reef fishers are sick of the continual barrage of new regulations and fees hitting them on a yearly basis, with three nine-day closure bag limits and the stupidity of having to mutilate their catch by removing pectoral fins. Considering that the only time fishers can get out to the reef is when weather conditions are favourable, which by DPI figures is four times a year, I question the need for any regulations and fees at all. I personally, after four failed attempts, got out to the John Brewer Reef myself and I could not believe the abundance of popular targeted fish species. Fishers do not need more fees and regulations—just a fair go and common sense.

The budget provides a big boost to the region, with \$16.1 million for the Gregory Development Road from Cape River to Lynd Junction. This road has been known as a billy goat track and a death trap. This is something that we have been lobbying for for years. It is a single-lane highway most of the way. I believe that it is downright dangerous for anybody to be confronted by triples or road trains. The only place they can go when that happens is either down a ditch, into a tree or into an oncoming prime mover. This \$16.1 million is very welcome. The minister for main roads came to Charters Towers and spoke to all of those who were interested in this road being upgraded. I hope as a result of this we can see a good amount of funds put into that road and see that road graded and sealed once and for all. As I said, it is a billy goat track and a death trap.

We also welcome funding of \$9.5 million to upgrade the Flinders Highway between Townsville and Hughenden. I believe most of that is for Torrens Creek to Hughenden. I am hoping that once this is all completed the majority of these funds then can be transferred from the Flinders Highway—it is almost complete from Townsville to Hughenden—to the Gregory Development Road. We probably need \$25 million for the year. We need that road sealed and upgraded once and for all. The minister had the meeting in Charters Towers. The people of Greenvale would not attend the meeting because they had to travel 210 kilometres on a billy goat track and they felt it was too dangerous to attend the meeting.

It is good to see extra funding for disability services, up \$152.8 million from last year, with a total operational budget of \$1.235 billion. This funding boost will provide new and improved services such as respite care, access to speech therapy and social workers. This is very important for the electorate of

Charters Towers—the Charters Towers township itself and the surrounding district—because it has one of the highest per capita figures for people with disabilities in Australia.

In education, it was great to see that Hughenden and Prairie State School will receive an air-conditioning upgrade. We know how hot it is out in those western areas. There is funding for the completion of the neighbourhood centre in Charters Towers, and we know how important that service is to the Charters Towers community. There is \$370,000 for stage 3 of the revitalisation of the Hughenden CBD, which has come a long way. There is \$156,000 towards the construction of the new airport terminal at Richmond, and \$60,000 for the reconstruction of Cambridge Downs store at Richmond, as part of Queensland's 150th Legacy Infrastructure Program. Another boost was the \$500,000 for the upgrade of the Charters Towers water treatment plant, and that has been a very big issue for Charters Towers in relation to quality water and pressure.

I note that the government will receive an increase in royalties. Moranbah produces over \$6 billion to \$7 billion a year in gross revenue and probably pays the state government up to \$1 billion in royalties, yet we have a housing crisis, we have an aged-care crises and there are no maternity services at Moranbah. When a township contributes so much to Queensland, it is about time the government looked at providing services to those townships. I fully support any moves by this government to invest in infrastructure in those townships, especially the township of Moranbah. I wanted to bring that to the attention of the House.