




Speech by

Hon. Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

Hansard Friday, 17 June 2011

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; COMMUNITY AMBULANCE COVER LEVY REPEAL AND REVENUE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. CW PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (Minister for Disability Services, Mental Health and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships) (6.04 pm): Queensland is on the launching pad of a major economic recovery after being knocked around by the global financial crisis and an unprecedented period of natural disasters. We are ready to become the engine room of the Australian economy once again, with expected growth of five per cent next year and an enormous opportunity for jobs growth. This is great news but, more than that, I am pleased that the 2011-12 state budget has been able to deliver for the people who live, work and go to school in my electorate of Mulgrave. Yes, it is a tough budget for tough times, but it is also a budget with heart. At its core it is about our plans to rebuild Queensland while at the same time helping out families. It locks in the spending that will build back our communities better than ever. I quote—
Every little bit helps.

That was the quote in the *Cairns Post* in response to one of the key measures in this year's state budget from Claire Dauncey, who lives in Bentley Park in my electorate of Mulgrave. She was referring to the abolition of the community ambulance cover levy—the one that has appeared on people's power bills since 2003. Mother-of-three Ms Dauncey went on to say—

It's a saving that I think everyone would welcome, as long as it doesn't mean money is taken away from the ambulance.

The good news is that the ambulance will still show up but the bill will not. The \$140 million announcement means a saving of \$113 on the electricity bills of 1.4 million Queensland families and small businesses. This is a permanent change that will still see the Ambulance Service remain free for all Queenslanders.

The popular ClimateSmart program will also be extended for another two years, meaning potential savings of \$480 on household electricity bills. The Daunceys from Bentley Park bought their home three years ago—their first—and said schemes like the first home buyers grant made it a lot easier to buy a home. The measures announced by the Treasurer are aimed at families just like the Daunceys. We know that working families are grappling with cost-of-living issues.

There are also some great incentives for families to attain the great Australian dream of owning their own home. For first home buyers, there is zero stamp duty for homes under \$500,000 and there is the Queensland Building Boost that offers a \$10,000 grant for a new home contracted between 1 August 2011 and 31 January 2012. First home owners can now receive up to \$17,000. For families who already own a home but who want or need to trade up—perhaps because of a growing family—this could be the clincher to allow that to happen. This is not only designed to help Queenslanders into new homes but is deliberately designed to be a massive stimulus package for building new homes, kick-starting the housing market and generating jobs and construction.

Far North Queenslanders already know we live in the best part of the state, but it is no secret that our region has been experiencing growing pains for some time, dealing with higher than average unemployment and a need to diversify our local economy. With continued careful planning, I think we are

ready to grow into what we have always known was our destiny—to be Queensland's most liveable region. In order for that to happen, as a region we need to take advantage of this opportunity. We need to put out the welcome mat for those considering the move from down south. We need people to know that we are a great destination for fly-in fly-out workers to base themselves and their families. We need to have a very steady stream of population drift to the Far North to assure our future. Above all, we need not be scared of growth because it will be the thing that will ultimately make our piece of paradise that much better.

Education and vital social services underpin this budget. In the next four years we are going to see the biggest change to our education system since the introduction of prep. There is \$328 million over four years for state schools for building works to move year 7 to secondary school in 2015, which means a better education system for our children. In Mulgrave this budget ensures \$2.3 million for the Cairns Early Years Centre at Bentley Park College to give local children a flying start to their education and families more support. It also locks in \$1.11 million towards the kindy at White Rock State School, which is being fast-tracked to be open by 2012 and to open up opportunities sooner for young children in our local area. There is also an extensive maintenance program worth around \$43,000—important funding that will help pave the way for local year 7 students to make the move to high school. I seek leave of the House to have the remainder of my speech incorporated in *Hansard*. I have the approval of the Speaker and I have sent an electronic copy of my speech to Hansard.

Leave granted.

This budget puts first and foremost the State Government's plans to rebuild our state as part of Operation Queensland.

This budget has seen \$151.3 million go to local governments for recovery and reconstruction projects, in partnership with the Australian Government. This includes \$15 million to assist the Cassowary Coast Regional Council restore vital infrastructure, vegetation and beaches. It also included \$14.1 million of \$20 million for industry clean-up and building industry resilience following Cyclone Yasi.

And whilst not part of this budget, the recent \$390,000 upgrade of the Innisfail airport means that aircraft the size of Hercules will be able to land there in emergencies to bring in vital supplies. This upgrade should be completed by the end of this month.

We are enormously grateful for the kindness and generosity of the United Arab Emirates for their gift of \$30 million which, along with \$30 million from Queensland Government will over two years see the construction of at least ten category-5 rated cyclone shelters in North and Far North Queensland.

Like many others, as someone who has grown up with the yearly threat of cyclones, I know that our local community has warmly received this news.

I've put forward a case for an additional shelter for Innisfail, as the major population centre in the Cassowary Coast, along with Tully. I also highlighted the need for a shelter for the Aboriginal community of Yarrabah, which is coastally exposed and has limited transport options.

I continue to lobby strongly, that the proposed Cairns Regional Council's Edmonton Leisure Centre at Walker Road could be bolstered and made bigger and better if it were to be selected as the site for one of the 10 shelters.

The southern corridor of Cairns is the known population growth area for the Far North. There is a recognised need for an indoor multipurpose facility for the southern corridor, as well as a PCYC, to help—in particular young people under the age of 18 who make up around one third of the population in this area—to lead active and healthy lives.

One of my key priorities that I took to the last election was to work with Cairns Regional Council to push for such a facility to serve the needs of local people both now and for the future.

To secure this facility at Edmonton would be a real win for our local community—not only as a place of safety during a cyclonic event—but also for sport and recreation in the southern suburbs of Cairns.

This would complement the work of the Southern Corridor Sport and Recreation Taskforce that I established last year, and has already paid dividends for the local sporting community.

Working with Minister Kate Jones, I recently secured a section of state-owned land, worth potentially more than \$2.145 million if sold on the open market, to be dedicated as reserve and set aside as the final piece of Cairns Regional Council's master plan for the Alley Park Sporting Precinct.

This was a great example of state and local government working together—that was the whole point of the Taskforce, which will continue to work on other issues, including the future use of land adjacent to Petersen Park at Edmonton.

Like the land at Gordonvale, this land should be converted for sport and recreation use. This would of course not only see Edmonton Storm Junior Rugby League Club to expand, but would also allow the senior club to actually play and train in Edmonton, instead of Cairns where they currently hold home games which affects the clubs revenue base. There would also be potential benefits for a range of other sporting codes and recreational activities.

I'd also like to talk about a few other issues.

We're getting on with the job of the \$150 million upgrade in the southern corridor, and this is what people I speak to are crying out for.

\$41.04 million in federal funding is set aside in this budget to allow us to start construction between Sheehy Road at White Rock and Ray Jones Drive.

And things are happening. The tender process is nearing completion with the winning consortium to be announced in September. Relocation of the Department's RoadTek depot already underway.

Commuters in the southern corridor are one step closer to reduced congestion with construction expected to start onsite prior to Christmas for a completion date in 2013.

\$1.52 million to complete the replacement of the Gordonvale ambulance station at a total cost of \$2.34 million

Labor went to the last election with a policy to redevelop the existing Cairns Base Hospital site and to acquire land for a health facility in the southern suburbs of Cairns.

I'm proud to say this is exactly what is being delivered.

The budget sees the next \$50 million towards the \$446.3 million ongoing redevelopment of the Cairns Base Hospital, due to open in 2014.

The decision was made that a redeveloped Cairns Base Hospital will remain the primary hospital for Cairns and Far North Queensland for several years to come but we have also planned beyond the immediate horizon by purchasing land at Edmonton for future health services.

With the ongoing Cairns Base Hospital redevelopment we will have the capacity to perform procedures right here in the Far North, like radiation oncology services, which will mean around 340 patients per year will no longer have to travel to Townsville or Brisbane for treatment. It is because we rebuilt on the existing site that we have an expanded Emergency Department to treat more people and sooner.

These new and expanded services wouldn't have been available in this timeframe if we had started again on a greenfield site.

I'm very proud to have been able to secure land at a second facility in the future at Edmonton is not about splitting services we already have in Cairns. Future services should complement those in Cairns, not compete with them.

But we know the population in the southern suburbs will fill in over the next 15-20 years. That's why I advocated so strongly for a site to be confirmed—so it could be safeguarded—and it is only because of good planning that we can even consider having that discussion.

Expert health planners say we don't need a second hospital until after 2020, but I am determined to see something sooner.

The Premier ordered a review of the Health Service Plan for the Cairns region. This is the opportunity to give certainty about what is needed on that site and when. Initially, I'd like to see a health facility that provided important primary health care, community and out of hospital services, like physio appointments and ante-natal checks. And in the future, this health precinct would grow to a second supporting hospital for the region.

I want to take this opportunity to again put on the record that I am committed to delivering the best long term, sustainable health outcome—not only my local community, but for our region.

I was humbled to be elevated to Cabinet in February of this year and was tasked as Minister for Disability Services, Mental Health and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships

The budget for my portfolio is a record investment of \$1.855 billion to help people doing it tough. This investment is providing:

more services and support for people with a disability

\$70.3 million for community mental health

Funds to help young people with a disability—to give them the support they need so that they don't end up in residential aged care, and to create more support options to give young people with a disability the life skills and links they'll need once they leave school

Half a billion dollars to help our home and community care workers to help others

And \$80 million for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services—to roll out more housing, create jobs and job opportunities and to deliver better health and education outcomes—importantly, to help close the gap in Indigenous disadvantage.

There's a lot more work to be done and we remain determined, as a government, to deliver the best outcomes for people with a disability in Queensland.

As Disability Services Minister, locally I'm delighted there is a significant investment in disability services and support for carers and their families.

\$606,000 for Autism Queensland to help children with autism and their families to make the transition to school a little easier.

More than \$1.5 million for St John's Community Care to help reduce the number of younger people with a disability living in residential aged care facilities.

Organisations like the Endeavour Foundation and Innisfail District Flexi Respite will also be able to continue their good work supporting families and people with a disability in the region.

We'll have an extra five Local Area Coordinators in Queensland, including one for the Cassowary Coast.

Our community mental health package of included \$11.2 million over three years to help restore mental health and well-being to Queenslanders, particularly those in our flood-affected regions and the cyclone-damaged Far North.

It also set aside \$300,000 for the Men's Shed initiative. Men's Sheds have been a turning point for a lot of men, particularly men with mental health issues, alcohol dependency and low self esteem. The sheds are a place for men to get together in their own space, give each other support and share their stories. For some, it's a meeting place other than their local pub.

I'm keen to see more Men's Shed's in the Far North, and I'll work with community partners to try and make this a reality.

Mr Speaker, as I said earlier, this is a tough budget for tough times. It's a budget that will have a direct and positive impact on people's lives. That's what this budget is all about.