



Speech by


**Shane Knuth**

**MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE**

Hansard Thursday, 16 June 2011

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

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—LNP) (4.54 pm): I would describe Labor's 2011-12 state budget as another disappointing bankcard budget. This is another year when all funding for Queensland will be put on credit, with a now surging \$80 billion deficit on which the interest repayments will be \$595,000 per hour. It is an utter disgrace that the \$15 billion sale of Queensland's profitable assets has done nothing to reduce this debt.

I do welcome the abolition of the ambulance cover levy as many Queenslanders have been paying this levy multiple times year after year. It will provide some relief from the government's massive increases to the cost of electricity and car registration. The abolition of this tax is long overdue. I believe that Peter Beattie introduced it around 2003-04 because the Ambulance Service went broke. At that time no other Premier in Queensland had run a bankrupt Ambulance Service. Even former Premier Wayne Goss was able to manage the Ambulance Service, but not Peter Beattie.

The sad thing about this budget is the \$80 billion deficit. It all started when the Labor Party opposed the Wolffdene Dam. After that there was a water crisis. Then Peter Beattie flew over the Traveston Crossing and put his hand on his heart and said, 'I will build my dam there.' Then we had the energy crisis. Then we had the health crisis. We had crisis after crisis and now we have an \$80 billion deficit.

I acknowledge the \$10,000 grant to Queenslanders constructing or purchasing a new home up to the value of \$600,000, with first home buyers also eligible for the \$7,000 first home buyer grant, which will give a much needed boost to the housing industry and homebuyers. However, the government needs to be condemned for the average increase in stamp duty of over \$7,000. This means that stamp duty for a \$400,000 home will increase from \$5,250 to over \$11,825.

I welcome the \$8.5 million to reinvest in the Walkamin Research Station and the Mareeba Client and Training Centre. I bring to the attention of the House the importance of the Kairi Research Station and question whether it is saveable, because the government has sold off the dairy herd of that research station. I believe that there is a completely different climate from Walkamin to Mareeba and, likewise, to the southern part of the Tablelands when one is looking between Mount Garnett and Charters Towers, where we see the research station now in place. Kairi is important for research and extension. It is a completely different climate. When you travel through there it is raining and by the time you get to Walkamin it is dry. I stress the importance of retaining the Kairi Research Station.

The \$25 million in disaster response funding to improve the Kennedy Developmental Road from Three Ways to the Lynd Junction was a step in the right direction. That road is pounded day in, day out by triples, quadruples and road trains carrying superconcentrate. There needs to be better investment. It is

great that we can spend \$25 million, but we need a lot of work put into that road so that each year it is not ripped up and torn to pieces by those quadruple road trains.

Also welcome is the funding for the auxiliary fire station at Millaa Millaa, as well as the allocation of \$4 million to provide new housing for the aged across the Tablelands. This is a much needed investment in aged-care accommodation. The member for Cook knows that aged care is a big issue in the Tablelands area.

Another new announcement is the construction of two new overtaking lanes on the Flinders Highway between Townsville and Charters Towers. This \$4.2 million initiative is money well spent. Since the closure of our rail service this section has become a deathtrap. It is very difficult to overtake, particularly from Mingela to Charters Towers. There are winding curves and ranges.

**Mr Johnson:** You have to have a two-way radio to tell them you are coming.

**Mr KNUTH:** That is right. Two overtaking lanes is a step in the right direction. However, the road between Townsville and the Burdekin has eight overtaking lanes while the road between Charters Towers and Townsville has only one overtaking lane. While two more overtaking lanes are to be constructed, a lot more work needs to be done.

It is an unbelievable joke that we closed down our rail freight services. The massive mining industry in the western province around Mount Isa and Cloncurry, and the farming communities around Julia Creek, Richmond and Hughenden, and the smaller towns in-between, rely on road transportation for everything. The ridiculous thing is that we have a railway line—the great northern railroad—running beside the main road, the Flinders Highway, all the way to Mount Isa. Just west of Bells Creek, a road train toppled over and blocked the road for 2½ hours. For two to three hours road trains, trucks, cars and other vehicles blocked the road for as far as the eye could see, yet there is a railway track running right beside the road with no transport on it.

It is disappointing that the budget contains no increase in the patient travel subsidy. This is a big issue for rural and regional Queensland, because in the past 20 years we have seen our health services downsized. Our hospitals have been downgraded to health centres. Our medical services have been moved to major centres such as Townsville, Cairns, Mackay and Rockhampton, which have become stressed like they are at the present moment. If we want to look after the main regional hospitals at Townsville, Cairns, Mackay and Rockhampton, we have to look after the regional and rural hospitals. If we look after them, we will keep people in their communities, we will keep people off the roads, we will save money in the patient travel subsidy scheme and we will take the pressure off the major regional hospitals on the coast.

It is ridiculous that the patient travel subsidy scheme has been increased by only 5c. It now pays 15c a kilometre and \$30 for a motel. That payment of 15c a kilometre has been increased only once in 15 years. It is an insult, especially as more people have to travel because of the downsizing of our health services in rural and regional Queensland. The way to solve that problem is to invest in health services.

This has been a big issue for the chemotherapy service at Atherton, which they are trying to downsize. People feel a great frustration about that. Many Tablelanders are forced to use the chemo service in Cairns, even though there is one available in the Tablelands. At a most vulnerable time in life, the last thing you want to do is drive down the range and find a parking spot at the hospital in the city and then have to try to access the travel subsidy scheme. That problem can be resolved by letting people access chemo services in their local hospitals. I bring this to the attention of the House because we want to save the chemo service in Atherton at all costs. There is no need to downsize it. The minister must thoroughly invest in that service. He has committed not to downgrade it, but we want to know why all our Tablelands patients are being directed to Cairns, especially at this most vulnerable time in their lives.

It is very important that the government is providing funding for the two overtaking lanes. The minister bragged about the \$17 million of disaster funding to be spent on the Flinders Highway. An issue that has been brought up time and time again relates to the Homestead community. Only two months ago, a drop of rain led to the closure for two days of Shovel Creek, Gardiner Creek and Puddler Creek. All livestock and all trucks were stuck for two days. The town of Petlin was a catastrophe, because the road was blocked following a small drop of rain. We need funds invested into that low-lying area. A whole mineral province can be cut off from a drop of rain. If the road was raised by two or three metres—that is all it needs—the problem would be resolved and people would not be caught, year after year.

It is also important that we flood proof the Gregory Developmental Road from Charters Towers to Mount Garnet. It was a catastrophe when that road was blocked off at Tully. There was no access anywhere. Once road users knew that there was an inland highway, there was a constant convoy of vehicles on it. We have a golden opportunity to have an inland highway to relieve traffic congestion on the coast. To create that inland highway all we need to do is upgrade a few creek crossings, such as at

Fletcher Creek, Basalt River, Clarke River, Stockyard Creek and Snake Creek. Raising the crossings a little would create the inland highway and—bang! We would not have the issues that we experience with the Bruce Highway today. It is important that the minister acknowledges that and invests in it, because it is a serious issue.

I turn to the Peak Downs Highway. In coal alone, \$6 billion in gross revenue comes out of the region, but the road is a catastrophe. A lot of money must be invested into that road. The government needs to take a good look at it. On the Tablelands, half a billion dollars of gross revenue comes out of the region from agriculture alone, but at Atherton the Gillies Highway is a disaster. The Kennedy Highway is a billy goat track.

**Mr O'Brien:** Oh, it is not.

**Mr KNUTH:** It is. The member should go and look at the Tumoulin Road turnoff. If he does not think it is a billy goat track, he should go and have a look at it. It is a billy goat track. The Millaa Millaa-Malanda Road has B-double access and is full of potholes. It is hard to get vehicles through it and is always blocked off. Often you cannot get through because of thick fog. Another problem exists with the Watsonville to Bakerville road. On that road the school bus has broken down seven times and the kids have been stuck in the bus. I know that the minister will be very sympathetic to that cause. We need about seven kilometres of that road sealed to solve the problem once and for all.

The budget contains a number of reannouncements, such as the Moranbah Youth Centre, the Ravenshoe Ambulance Station and the Charters Towers high school skills centre. Even though it has been a reannounced budget, those things are still much appreciated. I wanted to bring those issues to the attention of the House.