




Speech by

Hon. Andrew Powell

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

Hansard Thursday, 13 September 2012

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; FISCAL REPAIR AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. AC POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection) (3.42 pm): I, too, am pleased to make a reply with respect to the first Queensland LNP budget—indeed, the first LNP budget full stop. This is the first conservative budget in the 21st century. It is a budget for Queensland's future. Indeed, it is the most important budget in a generation. As I have said before, this budget is a turning point. It sets a course to navigate the state away from the treacherous path of debt, deficit and decline and back to prosperity. Let me contrast before and now.

Let me compare the fiscally reckless approach to financial management that prospered under previous environment ministers and the previous administration of the Department of Environment and Resource Management, commonly referred to as DERM, with the new fiscally responsible approach of the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection. Before I do that, I make the following observation: under the new EHP, staff have come on board to deliver this government's policy agenda. They have come on board under the leadership of my director-general, Andrew Chesterman, and his executive management team. I thank them for that. I am pleased to say that EHP staff are committed to being fiscally responsible and are focused on making a streamlined EHP the best environmental regulator in Australia. It is the rank and file—those who deliver our services, who consider our environmental approvals, who monitor the health of the environment, who protect our built heritage, who develop policy and legislation or offer corporate support—who will make a difference for the people of Queensland. They will do that not with more—not with a bigger budget, not by throwing money at a problem—but by being fiscally responsible, innovative and creative.

Before I look forward to the future again, it is timely to dwell on the past. It is prudent to note the financial mismanagement under the previous regime, particularly in DERM. In 12 months of the 2010-11 financial year, DERM racked up almost \$13 million in travel alone. That is more than \$1 million every month, just in travel alone, with \$9 million spent on airfares. If that was not enough, Labor put even more taxpayer dollars aside for jetsetting, with no less than \$16 million allocated in 2011-12. They were well on their way to achieving that figure, spending nearly \$12 million on travel in the first 10 months of the previous financial year, until we intervened in April. Similarly, under the previous leadership DERM spent over \$3 million per year on consultancy fees and a whopping \$75 million in contractors' fees in 2010-11. When the budget forecasts were looking grim for Labor, rather than curb spending this financial year they splurged out even more, laying out \$73 million on contractors and another \$3 million on consultancy fees in just 10 months from July 2011 to April this year.

By creating the stand-alone Environment and Heritage Protection portfolio and by breaking up the former DERM, this government can get on with the job of refocusing the department's core purpose to better protect local environments and to be a strong regulator, while facilitating appropriate and sustainable development. To this end—and I acknowledge the contributions of my colleagues, particularly the Deputy Premier—I am pleased to be a part of the Cabinet Resources Committee, to be led by the Deputy Premier. This committee will aggressively examine the impacts of government regulation, particularly on the mining

industry. This will build on the work we have already done in EHP through the green tape reduction bill and the ongoing work of our green tape reduction project team.

As I have said before and will continue to say, where companies are doing the right thing my Department of Environment and Heritage Protection will not be a roadblock to economic recovery and growth. Instead, we will be a facilitator that ensures that growth happens in a measured and sustainable way that is respectful of landholders and the environment. For years Labor added regulation upon regulation, layer upon layer. I acknowledge the Minister for Tourism, who is sitting beside me. As the shadow minister for small business, in the dying days of the election campaign one of her projects was to identify red tape that was strangling businesses in particular and organisations across the state. Many of the examples raised with the then shadow minister were around environmentally relevant activities and environmental regulation. They did not produce environmental outcomes. They strangled business and gave no benefit necessarily to the environment. That vine of green tape snaked its way into every nook and cranny of industry, suffocating commerce and strangling the life out of this state. Labor's approach was to put political green preferences above positive and practical environmental outcomes, as if adding thousands and thousands of environmental conditions actually changed the environmental outcome. By working together with the resource sector, the Cabinet Resources Committee will come up with new ways to reduce approval times, cut green tape and reduce the regulatory burden to facilitate the economic growth this state needs, whilst continuing to maintain the highest environmental standards.

This budget shows that we can be fiscally prudent, pro-environment and pro-business, and that those elements are not mutually exclusive. There is no doubt that we must grow our economy and it is essential that a healthy environment supports a robust economy. The cost savings achieved by my department will protect key regulatory, compliance and response services. By streamlining cumbersome processes, as undertaken recently through the green-tape reduction program, we will free up departmental resources that can then be redirected to front-line compliance and enforcement activities focused primarily on those industries and those businesses that present the highest risk to our environment to ensure the ongoing protection of Queensland's environment.

These changes to the department will help industry to get on with doing what it does best—contributing to a thriving economy and generating jobs whilst ensuring appropriate environmental management to protect the state's unique land and waterways. We will be investing a further \$2.8 million into coal seam gas regulation in addition to the almost \$5 million already allocated in 2012-13. We have also started work on a Healthy Harbour Partnership for Gladstone Harbour and have committed \$12 million over the next three years to fund projects run by grassroots community groups through our Everyone's Environment grants. These will be the first in what I hope will become a longer term trend to drive innovation and deliver better value for money for Queensland taxpayers.

As announced last week, we have committed half a million dollars this financial year as part of a \$1.5 million commitment to better manage crocodiles in North Queensland in partnership—in partnership—with local councils. As proof of our ability to listen and act, I can advise the House that Environment and Heritage Protection rangers trapped and removed a potentially dangerous crocodile from Cairns just days ago—a crocodile located in a built-up area that was over three metres in length.

Mr Cripps: Innisfail a couple of days before that.

Mr POWELL: That is correct. I take the interjection from the member for Hinchinbrook, the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines. Several days before that another crocodile was removed in the Innisfail area from the Johnstone River.

Mr Cripps: The plan is working, Minister.

Mr POWELL: The plan is working and I commend the work of my EHP rangers in actioning that plan, and I look forward to working with councils over the coming 30 days as we prepare local management plans in each of the councils of Townsville, Hinchinbrook, Cassowary Coast and Cairns.

We have also committed \$8 million in 2012-13 to purchase koala habitat as part of a wider three-year commitment, and we are currently receiving expressions of interest from South-East Queensland landholders. We are committed to protecting and managing our wildlife, but we cannot invest the necessary resources if we do not make tough decisions to balance our budget.

Moving to the electorate of Glass House, I am particularly excited about what this budget delivers for the electorate of Glass House, for the people of Glass House—what it means for local roads, for schools, for disabilities services, for health services that are the main winners from this historic LNP budget.

Firstly, I commend the Treasurer for his commitment to health—\$1.3 billion is committed to be spent on construction, expansion and redevelopment of hospitals across Queensland. As the Minister for Energy and Water Supply, the member for Caloundra and my neighbour, recently mentioned in his speech, we on the Sunshine Coast commend the government, commend our colleagues, commend the Minister for Health and the Treasurer, for getting the Sunshine Coast University Hospital off and running. It is also great to see the allocation in this year's budget of \$2.7 million to the Caboolture Hospital, which services my

electorate, for an education and skills centre and the commitment of \$8.5 million to continue the \$9.7 million expansion of the Caboolture Hospital's emergency department.

Another announcement that I am particularly proud of due to the financial relief it will offer the people of Glass House is the increase in the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme. Our government has increased the accommodation subsidy from \$30 to \$60 per person per night, with this being the first time it has increased since 1987. It is great to see that the travel subsidy has also been increased from 15c to 30c per kilometre, which will go a long way to help cover costs associated with having to travel to seek medical care.

For three long years, I, along with the good people of Glass House, have also been pleading with Labor to get started on overdue work on the Maleny-Kenilworth Road. For three long years there was no action, no support and no money from the previous government. I am pleased to see that in this first LNP budget nearly \$11.5 million will be spent on the Maleny-Kenilworth Road over the next two years, with the replacement of Grigor Bridge at Conondale, the rehabilitation of bridges and culverts along the road and flood repair work still not completed since the floods in 2011. This is a major win for the people of my electorate. But there is more good news.

The D'Aguilar Highway will also receive just under \$1 million to be spent on improving intersections at Bye Road and J Lindsay Road between Wamuran and Woodford and on road resurfacing. Additionally, \$11.9 million will go towards finishing the repair work—

Mr Nicholls: I think it is a very prudent allocation of funds.

Mr POWELL: I think it is a very prudent allocation of funds and I look forward to working with the Treasurer over the coming budgets to build on that for the D'Aguilar Highway. I note the investment that is going on in the highway in my good friend the member for Nanango's electorate, and I look forward to working with her as we continue to advocate for it. As I was saying, \$11.9 million will go towards finishing the repair work to Palmwoods-Montville Road and \$2.85 million over two years to continue the upgrade of the Pumicestone Road and Bruce Highway interchange. There is \$884,000 earmarked for repairs on the Maleny-Stanley River Road—again, long overdue repairs from the floods last year—and extra dollars for the intersections on the Landsborough-Maleny Road, and I thank the Minister for Transport for that investment.

Mr Nicholls: It's my money.

Mr POWELL: I thank the Treasurer for his allocation of the money to the Minister for Transport and Main Roads so that he could spend it in the good electorate of Glass House.

The Glass House community will also receive \$2.87 million in grants for disability services this year. I know we need better roads, I know families with disabilities need support, I know people need access to quality health services, but I also know that we cannot deliver any of these things without making the hard decisions outlined in this budget. Instead of wasting money on an ever-increasing interest bill, we will have more money to spend on delivering the services people need in the future. So I commend the Appropriation Bill, I commend the Treasurer for his vision and strength in articulating our responsible fiscal plan to get this state back on track, and I commend all of the LNP's leadership team in making difficult but necessary decisions to get this state back on track—out of the red and back in the black.