




Speech by
Gavin King

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

Hansard Thursday, 13 September 2012

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

 **Mr KING** (Cairns—LNP) (8.57 pm): It is an honour to rise in this place to contribute to the discussion on the 2012 state budget, which is without question the most important budget in a generation. The Cairns community was braced for a tough budget because of the torrid fiscal environment our government found itself entering on 24 March this year. Despite the financial rack and ruin we inherited, our government's inaugural budget has delivered a strategic and exciting combination of grassroots initiatives, reform and projects that will stimulate our regional economy and help families across our great city. The budget introduced measures that were long overdue and managed to make limited funds stretch to all corners of our community and to those sectors most in need.

Leading up to the release of this budget, on numerous occasions I met with unions and public servants about our public sector reforms and I acknowledge and apologise for the distress this process has caused, but we had no choice. Tough decisions and strong leadership were required to repair the damage done over almost two decades of Labor rule. Just this afternoon, global ratings agency Fitch confirmed our concerns about this debt and deficit legacy. In a statement issued today, Fitch said—

As a result of historically weak budget performance combined with large capital expenditure Queensland's debt has more than doubled in the last three years.

Queensland's debt matrix has weakened significantly and is no longer comparable with its international peers.

Negative rating action could occur should Queensland be unable to improve or stabilise its fiscal position over the next 3 or 4 years.

The newly elected state government has announced strong measures in its budget 2012/13 to restore Queensland's financial position, in particular, by achieving an operating surplus by the financial year ending 30 June 2014.

I would also like to point out that the Labor and union hype and hysteria in recent days and weeks by far exceeds the reality of the job losses on the ground in my electorate of Cairns. We must stabilise debt and we must regain our AAA credit rating. This budget shows that we have a set this state on that course. We have done the hard yards to reset the integrity of governance and the use of taxpayers' money for the benefit of all Queenslanders long into the future.

This inaugural budget of this government has brought many firsts for Cairns. For the first time, Cairns has been delivered a real commitment for our CBD—not gold plated, phantom promises that cannot be delivered but an affordable opportunity to deliver a revitalised Lake Street in our city's heart before the global spotlight shines on Cairns for the G20 meeting of finance ministers in late 2014. For the first time, real respect has been paid to our local SES heroes, with a contribution in this budget of \$1.3 million for a new SES headquarters after those volunteers have been forced to work from a building that is literally falling down around them.

For the first time in years, real focus has been paid to long-term economic growth opportunities, with \$2.5 million in this budget to start the process of opening up our port to larger ships, set to reap long-term economic benefits for our city's economy and help push our case for the expansion of HMAS Cairns. For the first time, a real commitment to fix the Bruce Highway was made, with \$1 billion over 10 years. The Bruce is the lifeblood of Far North Queensland and everyone in my part of the world waits with bated

breath for the day the federal Labor government steps up to the mark and contributes funds to this National Highway.

Reinstatement of the stamp duty concession for homebuyers, coupled with the \$15,000 building incentive plus a low current rental vacancy rate of 2.1 per cent, means confidence in the housing market in Cairns is set to lift after years of stagnation. With apologies to my colleagues from Townsville, these measures mean that Cairns is simply the best place in Queensland to build a home right now.

For the first time in a very long time, there is renewed passion to unite and capitalise on this government's investment in aviation and its success in attracting China Southern and China Eastern flights to Cairns. With a range of partners, our government has brought these flights to us, and the Cairns community is working as one to keep them coming over the long term.

For the first time in a long time, local people in Cairns are being empowered to make local decisions. Our \$200 million school maintenance fund will be accessible—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Krause): Order! There is too much noise in the chamber. I would like to hear the member for Cairns.

Mr KING: Thank you for your protection, Mr Deputy Speaker. Our \$200 million school maintenance fund will be accessible to all Cairns state schools for the first time, allowing school communities to choose for themselves the projects, the local tradies, builders and suppliers. Our fantastic new hospital board is administering \$3.7 million for the recruitment of extra specialists to revitalise front-line services as part of our government's \$15 million boost to specialist services at Cairns Base Hospital. A new centre for chronic disease prevention and care will be established with a budget announcement of \$850,000.

For the first time, our budget has recognised the disadvantaged suffered by patients in the massive Cairns Base Hospital catchment by doubling the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme. Many people travel long distances to Cairns or to bigger centres for specialised treatment. Financial relief for those people is now finally being provided in this budget.

For the very first time, law and order issues in our city have been seriously tackled by the allocation of \$500,000 for Operation Escalate, a police blitz on unruly behaviour in our CBD and surrounds. I sincerely thank and commend the Premier and the police minister for taking such decisive action on this longstanding problem. The addition of 13 full-time police will also continue this incredible work already done by our hardworking front-line police officers.

This budget also contains around \$17 million for disability services and capital works—an important investment to meet the needs of so many people and families in my electorate. Other important initiatives for Cairns include ongoing funding for the upgrade of Ray Jones Drive and the redevelopment of Cairns Base Hospital, the establishment of an AFL junior academy in Bungalow and the construction of two football fields at the Manunda sporting precinct. For the first time, this budget tackles cost-of-living pressures for families and red tape for business through measures such as freezing tariff 11, freezing car registration and lifting the payroll tax threshold for small to medium sized businesses.

In my role as the Assistant Minister for Tourism, I pay tribute to the tourism minister for her passion and dedication to meeting our government's target of doubling overnight visitor expenditure. Despite tough financial constraints, I know how hard the minister fought for a good deal for our tourism industry, and that hard work has resulted in a boost of \$20 million for a Tourism Investment Strategy focusing on emerging markets. Tourism is a vibrant, dynamic portfolio but it comes with significant challenges to turn around what has been an industry routinely ignored and treated with contempt by the former Labor government.

On the contrary, our government takes tourism very seriously, evidenced by our commitment to elevate this industry as one of our four economic pillars. We have held the DestinationQ forum in Cairns, a remarkable forum featuring some 300 industry players gathered for the first time in some two decades. The DestinationQ forum is still talked about to this day because it was not the normal talkfest that the industry had grown so tired of. It was a frenetic, working meeting with measurable outcomes and strategies mapped out and signed off at the end of the two-day event.

In my role as the assistant minister, I also chair the Tourism Backbench Working Group, a regular forum that meets during parliamentary sittings with my parliamentary colleagues. We have many goals and tasks and we will act as the eyes and ears of tourism right across this state to identify potential projects and the roadblocks they have for so long encountered.

In parallel to our government's legislative measures and the release of our first budget, for the very first time in a long time there are green shoots of economic recovery emerging in Cairns. In recent weeks and months I have spoken to businesses of all shapes and sizes who are reporting some of their best and brightest trade for many, many years. These businesses, from Allsigns Print and Design through to Cairns Airport, tell me that confidence is once again returning to Cairns, that there is a pulse again, a buzz in the air. While times are still tough and unemployment still high, I firmly believe that Cairns is on the way up once again, that our horizon is bright.

This budget draws a line in the sand. It sets Cairns and Queensland on a new path to prosperity. I sincerely congratulate the Treasurer, the Premier and all cabinet ministers for the incredible task they set and for the incredible results they have delivered in this budget. I am incredibly honoured to represent the people of Cairns and I know this budget is just the start of helping my community reach new heights as the gateway to the Asia-Pacific region and the tropical jewel of Queensland. I commend this budget and the bill to the House.