



Speech by


**Shane Knuth**

**MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE**

Hansard Thursday, 13 September 2012

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

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—KAP) (4.53 pm): I rise to speak to the Appropriation Bill, the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill 2012 and the Fiscal Repair Amendment Bill. There are three things that contribute to the context of this budget that I believe are vitally important in understanding how devastating it is to the faith of Queenslanders in the political process, the integrity of parliament and the hope for the future prosperity of Queensland. The first is the promises and commitment by this government as it stormed into power—promises that services in the bush would be valued by the LNP government; rural fires would receive greater support for equipment, training and resources; and communities would receive a greater return from mining royalties. Public servants were promised that an LNP government would look after them and that they would have nothing to fear. Queenslanders were promised that front-line services would be protected and strengthened. But as soon the LNP gained power, the rules changed and the new government shamelessly redefined what front-line services mean.

This government promised that it would lead with dignity and grace, but all we have seen is a government that has hidden behind a politically motivated Commission of Audit, which was drafted by the former federal Liberal Treasurer, to justify sacking 14,000 people without the decency to front those people and explain why their jobs have been sacrificed to further a political cause. The reality is that the Commission of Audit was received by the LNP with religious fervour and applause and has been quoted time and again, with projections of debt and bloated Public Service figures against the background soundtrack of asset sales, to prepare the Queensland people for the LNP's 2015 election campaign. This government has remained so fixated on the past mismanagement of the former government that it has failed to recognise that this budget provides no plan to generate wealth or build industry. The LNP has committed Queensland to the path of poverty, which will inevitably culminate in the sale of our ports and energy sectors.

The LNP would have us believe that there is no money in the kitty for vital infrastructure projects like the upgrade of the Mareeba Airport, at a measly cost of \$13.3 million, because of the financial incompetence of the former Labor government. But the truth is that there is no money, because this government has put aside \$550 million for the Premier's palace on the north bank, which they call the 'Taj Mahal'. This is the type of decision that defines this budget: wasteful expenditure on projects that will bring no return while withdrawing funding from projects that would revitalise industry, create jobs and generate wealth for decades to come. On top of that is the \$800 million that will be paid out to public servants, who have committed no crime. That totals \$1.5 billion that could have been used to pay off debt. Instead, we have a \$1.5 billion debt as a result of this 'Taj Mahal' and the \$800,000 that is needed to pay out public servants.

Rather than fund the east-west energy corridor and open up the north-west minerals province, the Premier and the Treasurer, in their infinite wisdom, have decided to gouge the mining industry with higher royalties, right when the resources sector is shedding jobs and withdrawing investment. The CopperString energy project and the rail corridor would have opened up the north-west minerals province, creating

thousands of jobs and drawing billions of dollars in royalties and revenue without having to increase mining taxes or cast uncertainty over Queensland's mining future.

It is not only projects that have been given the axe in regional Queensland but also services that are vital to the economic survival of many small communities that have been axed. The Healthy Lifestyle Program in Charters Towers is an example of a program that has been dropped. This has happened after two members of the LNP came to Charters Towers and said what a wonderful service it was. They told the *Northern Miner* and the residents of Charters Towers, 'Stick with us and we will look after you.' The Community Literacy Program, which provided adult literacy services, has been axed. Over 70 per cent of its clientele were gainfully employed after completing the courses that that program provided. The farm financial assistance program, which was very valuable to the farmers in Mareeba, has been slashed.

One of the most disturbing aspects of this budget is the focus on slashing services that assist the most vulnerable in our society. I have mentioned the Community Literacy Program, which has been operating in Far North Queensland for 20 years. In that time it has helped thousands of adults become employed or further their careers, which has opened job opportunities in the region. Many students have become trainers themselves and have found great direction, drive and satisfaction in educating and assisting others to better themselves and contribute to the economic and social wellbeing of Far North Queensland. This program has been slashed. The program had just gained access to the Indigenous community in Mossman. However, the axing of this program now means that those who are struggling because of literacy or learning difficulties will now have to travel to access adult education in Cairns. This means that many will no longer pursue adult education and will most likely slip through the cracks that will be created by this government's lack of consistency and compassion.

The Tenant Advice and Advocacy Service, a service that was largely funded through the interest from tenants' bond payments, has been closed. It will no longer be there to prevent thousands of people from becoming homeless every year. The inconsistency of this decision beggars belief. This service operates with little effect on the budget bottom line. It provides an essential and unique service to tenants with high and complex needs, including those with disabilities, mental health issues and the elderly. The loss of this service will severely affect the rental market and the justice system as thousands of cases will now go to QCAT or the Residential Tenancies Authority for mediation. I table a non-conforming petition of 70 signatories who use this service, asking for the government to acknowledge the social and economic consequences of closing this service and to keep the Tenant Advice and Advocacy Service going.

*Tabled paper:* Non-conforming petition regarding the Tenant Advice and Advocacy Service Queensland [1058].

It is these types of programs, that are the front line in combatting homelessness, welfare dependence and that encourage industry growth through better management practices, that this government has had the audacity to label non-essential. They may not be essential in urban areas where people have access to public transport and multiple facilities, but in the bush these services ensure those disadvantaged by the tyranny of distance have access to services that will improve their lot and provide a path to a better quality of life. The rationale of closing these services down appears both heartless and ignorant of the real issues facing rural and regional Queensland.

There is nothing for the bush to be confident about in this budget. It was good to see a former National Party member take a stand on the cutbacks in the Rural Fire Service. This member understands the devastation and destruction of wildfires that are caused by 44 degree heat and the need for rural fires at the front line. Rural fires provide a staggering 93 per cent of Queensland with essential volunteer fire fighting services to back up regular emergency services personnel. Prior to the election and as late as July this year, rural fires had received assurances from the minister that an LNP government would provide greater support. The reduction of 57 per cent in rural operations uniformed positions will cut the heart out of the Rural Fire Service that is so vital for rural and regional Queensland. What this translates into is the gutting of rural fire services so that volunteers will be left to fight fires without adequate equipment, training or support. This is not just bad economically, as fires threaten billions of dollars of rural land production and infrastructure, but it is an act of gross negligence to put volunteers at extreme risk of what is predicted to be the worst bushfire season in 50 years. There is absolutely nothing to be gained from cutting such an essential front-line service and I hope that the member for Gregory's comments on the ABC today get through to the Treasurer and the Premier because this has to be one of the most disastrous decisions I have ever seen in my parliamentary career.

The Goss government cutbacks were devastating for rural and regional Queensland. We saw thriving communities such as Nelia, Nonda, Maxwellton and Torrens Creek, which had a football team, all become ghost towns after the cutting of the rail service and the closing of the courthouses which impacted on other services. That was devastating, but that was small compared to what these cutbacks are equivalent to with the sacking of 14,000 public servants who have committed no crime. I have had nurses who I have met and have rung me who have bawled their eyes out. I have met people who have lost their job as a result of these cutbacks who have said they voted for the LNP. They put their faith and trust in the LNP. I have spent my entire political life trying to convince people why they should not vote for the Labor

Party and the LNP gets into the government and 14,000 people who have committed no crime lose their jobs.

**Mr Cox** interjected.

**Mr KNUTH:** You will not be around for the next election so there is no use you talking. Your job will be gone as well.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Miss Barton): Order! The member for Dalrymple will direct his comments through the chair.

**Mr KNUTH:** Under the budget there are funding measures in relation to national parks and streamlining permit systems to get rid of feral pests and, likewise, flying foxes. Over the years the Charters Towers City Council has spent nearly half a million dollars chasing bats. That was a complete waste of money. The minister and the Premier came to Charters Towers and said people will come first before bats. Yesterday the minister said to me that it is my responsibility, my fault, and I should be communicating with the council. But it was the minister and the Premier who said in the paper at least three times that they will get rid of the bats at all costs. I cannot get through his thick head that Charters Towers—

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order!

**Mr KNUTH:** I withdraw that. We cannot get the bats out of the area through booms and bangs and noise and smoke. A simple solution is to cull the flying foxes. That is simple. The problem is resolved once and for all. The minister has been dodging, weaving and hiding. I know the minister is sympathetic to the flying fox cause. For 8½ years I have brought up flying foxes. I do not want to come into this parliament and bring up flying foxes. All that the minister has to do is go to Charters Towers, talk to the council and say they will get rid of the bats like they promised.

**Government members** interjected.

**Mr KNUTH:** Do you want to see five different paper clippings?

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Dalrymple will come to order. I have asked you to direct your comments through the chair. Please do so.

**Mr KNUTH:** All the minister has to do is work with me and the council in bringing about the appropriate permits that will resolve the problem once and for all, rather than arguing, dodging, weaving, blaming and hiding. It is that simple. Come to Charters Towers. They pounded the streets day in day out and promised every visit that they would get rid of the bats at all costs and by whatever means possible. Go there again after the election because it is a promise and get rid of the bats. It is as simple as that.

There is one beacon of light in what is an otherwise bleak budget and that is the long-overdue increase of the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme. That will greatly benefit those in the bush and I commend the government for fulfilling that election promise. I acknowledge those who have lobbied over the years. When I was first elected in 2004 I tabled a petition of over 700 signatures in relation to increasing that Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme. Most of our rural medical services have been removed and patients now have to travel further and further, especially the elderly, and when they apply for funding it is only a pittance. I believe the increase in funding is a great decision.

I welcome the continuation of the funding to complete the work on the Kennedy Highway. Likewise I welcome the funding for the Atherton and Charters Towers hospitals and the funding for the auxiliary fire and rescue station at Millaa Millaa. I am hoping that the funding allocated to Flinders Highway will be directed to areas where it is most needed such as Shovel and Gardener Creek crossing. This is something that I have lobbied for, along with the chamber of commerce, rural representatives and the livestock industry. All it takes is a drop of water in that low-lying area 70 kilometres west of Charters Towers and the whole western mineral province transport operation is shut down. If funding could be directed to upgrade this area the problem would be resolved once and for all.

I believe that rural Queenslanders were looking forward to a government that would protect their interests and return the bush to its rightful place as a generator of much of this state's wealth. I believe there were those who voted for the LNP because they believed the LNP government would restore the balance.

**Mr Rickuss** interjected.

**Mr KNUTH:** Seventy-five per cent of the state is not receiving funding, member for Lockyer. People who hoped for a change are feeling disappointed and disillusioned. I believe rural Queensland is feeling betrayed and deceived. Queensland needs a government that is willing to commit to investment that will create new jobs and underpin strong economic growth into the future. The truth is that unless there is immediate investment in these types of projects the future of Queensland is bleak. We heard the Premier

deride the Labor Party for its lack of vision or plan for Queensland's future, but the reality is that the two major parties have both demonstrated they lack the intestinal fortitude to invest in wealth generation and create future revenue opportunities. The government's once-in-a-generation budget will stifle growth and increase unemployment. Rather than securing a better future, this budget demonstrates that the LNP's only plan for getting Queensland back in the black is to sell Queensland off, ruining the lives of tens of thousands of families who have committed no crime.