




Speech By
Hon. Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Record of Proceedings, 6 June 2014

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; REVENUE
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—LNP) (3.36 pm): Today is Queensland Day, the 155th anniversary of when our state separated from the colony of New South Wales.

Mr Holswich: Best thing we ever did!

Ms SIMPSON: I think it was a terrific move and one we are still celebrating. A can-do attitude built this state and a can-do attitude is what motivates us to do the hard yards to build an even greater future. In speaking in the budget reply debate for 2014-15 let me say this: this is a good budget for my electorate of Maroochydore, the 330,000 people in the region of the Sunshine Coast and Queensland as a whole. It delivers benefits not only for today but lays a sound foundation for the future, with increases in funding for good local projects such as the Bruce Highway, health and schools in my area. I am thrilled to see funding for the Coolum Police Station, with its move from the temporary site to a permanent location, which has been funded in this budget.

Before reporting on the wins in my electorate, let me first reflect on some history as there are lessons that resonate true today. Good government is about empowering people rather than ruling over them and leadership is about taking responsibility rather than shifting responsibility to another generation. Back in 1859, one of the key reasons our state was created was the pragmatic realisation that Queensland could not and should not be ruled from Sydney. We were too far away and there were too many challenges and opportunities that needed hands-on leadership and timely decision making by people who not only invested in this part of the world but also lived here. Queenslanders, those who lived in the area that was then known as the Northern Districts of New South Wales, realised that if we were to develop and reach our potential then we needed self-determination—we needed self-representation. That came about by having our own government. Our forefathers and foremothers, even though they were not allowed to vote at first, took the risk when they lobbied for Queensland's statehood, but they wanted to be responsible for creating a better society. Interestingly, the legislature of New South Wales voted in opposition to Queensland separating from this part of the world—

A government member: Outrageous.

Ms SIMPSON: Indeed, it was outrageous—but fortunately to no effect because it had been proclaimed that this would occur. The audacity of the opposition prompted a response that was reported in the *Argus* on 12 October 1859—

We believe that Queensland, with a territory of 140,000 acres and a population of 25,000 people, an export trade of the annual value of £600,000 and her almost incalculable resources of natural production, is quite well able to stand on her own legs, and needs no longer to be in leading-strings.

Queensland had humble origins but great ambitions and this beautiful parliamentary building, which was started in 1864, is testament to that. The history of this building reflects the early economic history of the state. The colony started with high hopes and the potential to grow its economy, but it

also started with debt. At first that debt was manageable. Then a banking collapse overseas where the state's loans were held, exacerbated by spiralling building costs here at Parliament House, meant that work had to be ceased until the state was in a better financial position and could rescope the works and get on with it. Fortunately, then gold was discovered in Gympie and the mining boom was on.

As I said earlier, good government is about empowering people rather than ruling over them and leadership is about taking responsibility rather than shifting responsibility to another generation. Our state does have a bright future if we are prepared to talk honestly and act decisively together to tackle the excessive burden of debt that this government inherited, while still delivering services and infrastructure today. The loss of the state's AAA rating a few years ago cannot be sugar coated. It was a disgrace. It is hard evidence of the damage suffered by our state's finances. At the highest levels, this debt is estimated to cost about \$450,000 an hour in interest repayments.

Any responsible household knows that debt is like fire: it is a good servant but a bad master. If we do not keep it under control, it will control us. The plan released by the Treasurer this week to secure the finances and the economy of Queensland is about taking control back for Queenslanders. It is about a fair go for today's citizens and future citizens, the children of the state, so their opportunities are not hocked by debt deniers and wasters of public funds for short-term sugar hits of popularity. It is also a watershed in how state governments, over many terms, have interacted with constituents by involving them in the decisions. I still remember 21 May 2009 in this chamber when I asked Rachel Nolan, the then transport minister, about her government's plans to sell assets. The minister famously and erroneously replied—

Queensland Rail is not for sale.

Mr Sorensen: I remember it.

Ms SIMPSON: That is right. About four days later, apparently it was for sale. The front page of the paper declared the news that the Bligh Labor government was planning asset sales that they did not bother to tell the people of Queensland about before the election. This LNP government is keeping its promise not to sell major assets without going to the people at a state election. This state government is also involving the people of Queensland in a conversation about what excessive debt means for the future of this state—an interest bill of \$450,000 per hour, at the highest, is not sustainable—and what the loss of the AAA rating has meant not only for the state government but also for local governments as they pay more when borrowing. I commend the Treasurer for the engagement tools he has released to involve Queenslanders in this conversation about what it takes to get the raging fire of debt back under control so that it serves rather than burns us and we can build the sustainable infrastructure that is required.

I also commend the draft action plan, which is about up-cycling state assets, getting more for Queenslanders from their assets to build the infrastructure and deliver the services the state needs, without the dead hand of more burdensome tax. Public consultation on how Queenslanders want the money released from reinvesting these assets is now open. Consultation is open so that people can be involved in deciding the priorities and how that money should be spent. I welcome people's feedback in that process, which is open until 15 August. We are asking Queenslanders how they want spending prioritised and allocated for the infrastructure spend of \$8 billion.

I am already on the record in support of the upgrade of the north coast rail line to the Sunshine Coast. Our region of more than 330,000 people currently has an 1880s rail alignment. In 2014, when the tilt train travels through that area its top speed is only about 50 or 55 kilometres an hour. What they did in the 1880s was amazing, but it is time—it is more than time—for a new rail alignment that services our regional area of the Sunshine Coast and connects us to greater South-East Queensland. It is vital infrastructure to connect our region and to anchor a better public integrated transport system across the coast. I am also lobbying for more road projects, as well as other essential long-term infrastructure for the Maroochydhore electorate and the Sunshine Coast.

I celebrate and commend the wins we see in this 2014-15 budget, because through judicious budgeting there is much good news. I have mentioned before the Coolum Police Station. I am thrilled to see that, through my advocacy for this station, the site that has been leased since 2005 will be no more and we will have a permanent home for the police, with more than \$2.2 million allocated to relocate the police station near the ambulance station. That is a great outcome.

For the Bruce Highway, I am pleased to see further funding announcements for upgrades between Caboolture and the Sunshine Motorway Interchange. This will include six-laning works and two new interchanges from Caloundra Road to the Sunshine Motorway and interchange upgrades. \$24.5 million has been allocated to start stage 1 of that work, which is a joint project between the Australian and Queensland governments and is desperately needed. It is in addition to the

\$80.3 million from the Australian government for the \$195 million program of interchange upgrades between Caboolture and Caloundra.

On the Safe Night Out Strategy, there is legislation before the House so I will not talk about the details of that legislation. However, the funding in this budget is very welcome. On the Sunshine Coast we have seen the tragic deaths of a couple of people where violence touched their lives in a way that has left a permanent mark on their families. As I said, I will not allude to the legislation but certainly I commend the \$44 million commitment in the budget going forward for this program. It is about changing culture. It is about more resources for the police and looking at other mechanisms, but it is also about tackling the issue of educating those who binge drink and take no responsibility for their actions, with tragic consequences.

Concessions for pensioners will continue thanks to this state government stretching its budget to cover the federal government cuts to concessions. I understand that this will cost the state about \$50 million extra, but it is recognition that it is easier for the state to do that than for ordinary pensioners who do not have a lot of spare cash. The state has significantly lifted its subsidies to bridge this gap to help vulnerable Queenslanders.

I commend the Minister for Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services for her work in one of the most challenging but most necessary of portfolios to assist vulnerable Queenslanders. The Carmody review implementation is funded by this government, with about \$400 million in additional funding over the next five years to assist this very vital work. I particularly commend the minister for the help she has given to people with disabilities and their families. Recently, that important work certainly has helped ageing parents of disabled children in my electorate. It is very humbling when you see how tough some people do it. They have lived a life of care for their children and the disability those children have means they need a lot of extra help. I know the minister is doing a lot of work in this area to help more families and I certainly appreciate it.

A caring and compassionate government is one that recognises both human and financial needs, as both are intertwined. The stronger our state budget into the future, the better we can support those who have special needs. I seek leave to have the rest of my speech incorporated into *Hansard*. I can confirm the Speaker has read the rest of the speech!

Leave granted.

Health Funding is up and so is Education spending

Health spending is up 6% in this budget.

- \$369.768 million has been allocated in 2014/15 towards construction of the \$1.87 billion Sunshine Coast Public University Hospital (due to be completed in 2016).
- \$6.393 million has been allocated towards additional beds to be constructed at the Sunshine Coast Community Care Unit
- \$7.384 million has been allocated in 2014/15 for minor capital projects across the HHS
- \$1.406 million has been allocated towards health technology equipment throughout the HHS.

Improvements in health service delivery and waiting times:

- In just thirteen months [Feb 2013 to Mar 2014] the number of Sunshine Coast residents on Queensland Health's dental waiting lists for more than two years has been slashed—I am advised from 4,204 to just 207
- Local waiting times for public hospital appointments have been reduced with more than 400 public patients being referred to the newly opened Sunshine Coast University Private Hospital to receive treatment free of charge. This will continue to be used for public healthcare services until our new Public University Hospital opens in 2016 with 450 beds.

Education spending is up 7% to \$11.8 billion—and on the Sunshine Coast ...

- Education funding for the region includes \$12 million to prepare schools for the transition of Year 7 into high school next year.
- Nearly \$800,000 has been awarded to 5 schools in my electorate under the Great Results Guarantee Initiative to boost literacy and numeracy outcomes.
- Over \$2 million (\$2,125,733) to schools in my electorate to help clear maintenance backlog in 2012-13 and 2013-14

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| Maroochydhore Schools Capital Works Total Expenditure | 1,614,786.73 Actual 2012-13 | 984,274.63 Planned 2013-14 |
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Tourism/Economy/jobs/Small business

Our State economy is growing, leading Australia. The latest ABS data shows that Queensland dwelling approvals rose 3.8% in December, which is the highest level in six years and marks 24 consecutive months of increases, placing approvals at 58.6% higher than in December 2011.

The State Government is continuing to support our construction sector, with more than 4,200 Great Start Grants of \$15,000 already helping Queensland's first time buyers.

Sunshine Coast businesses have created more jobs than any other region in the March ABS data which shows there were 11,300 more people in work in the region than 12 months before. The unemployment rate has fallen 0.6 percentage points to 6.1%.

We are unabashedly “pro-business” in tackling red tape, and supporting the job creators who hold the key to unlocking job opportunities for our region.

After some tough years for many businesses and job seekers, there is still a way to go but the positive figures are welcome and heading in the right direction.

Local tourism operators have reported a turnaround for 2013-14 year.

Tourism is one of the Queensland economy’s four pillars and is extremely important to the Sunshine Coast.

The State Government is committed to doubling Queensland’s annual overnight visitor expenditure to \$30 billion by 2020.

Building the new east-west runway at the Sunshine Coast airport and securing more international tourists is critical to growing local jobs. The State Government has contributed land to the regional council to help facilitate this.

Housing—reduction in wait times

- 40% reduction in social housing waiting list (March 2012-Jan 2014)

Reductions in crime rates

For the Sunshine Coast Police Region—the latest figures are stunning with robberies down 54% and unlawful entry down 17% since Operation Resolute commenced (1 October 2013) to 31 April 2014 compared to the same period for 2012/2013. (The percentage rate change is per 100,000 head of population).

I will continue to fight tenaciously for my area as a local member first.

It is a privilege to serve in this House as Speaker but first and foremost it is a privilege to serve the people of the Sunshine Coast as a local member, who as part of a strong Government team is working to deliver for the future of the Sunshine Coast and Queensland.