




Speech By  
**Dale Last**

**MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN**

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**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL**

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (12.03 am): When I came into this parliament six months ago I spoke about the need for economic development and jobs in the Burdekin electorate. We have some of the biggest projects in Australia waiting in the wings and the budget brought down on Tuesday does little to progress those projects and, in turn, create the jobs that we so desperately need in North Queensland. The government went to the last election on a commitment of jobs, infrastructure and the economy and yet already we know that our unemployment rate will barely move during the course of this term of government. In the words of one of our political commentators, job creation is now effectively on the never-never with limited infrastructure projects on the drawing board. Communities such as Bowen and Collinsville are hanging by a thread holding out hope that this budget would finally deliver the projects they so urgently need to kick-start their local economies, to provide confidence for local businesses and, more importantly, jobs. The residents in these communities are sick of treading water. They are looking for dry land and the opportunities that infrastructure development will bring with it. Yet, again, the government has let them down. There are organisations like the Bowen Collinsville Enterprise and the chamber of commerce desperately trying to create development opportunities and they are doing it alone.

The Premier said in this chamber that she was standing shoulder to shoulder with Queenslanders. I can tell honourable members unequivocally that that does not extend to the good people living in Bowen, Collinsville or the Burdekin. The government can provide all the training in the world, but what does that mean if they do not have the jobs for these people to go to? We hear the word 'resilience' being bandied around and I can tell honourable members that I have some of the most resilient communities in Queensland in my electorate, but their patience is wearing thin. How many more times do we have to tell the long-suffering residents of Bowen that the Abbot Point redevelopment is going ahead? How many more times will these people have the rug pulled out from underneath them? Is it any wonder they have become cynical and disillusioned with this government?

This state needs rural and regional Queensland and those communities in the regions need to know that the government will have the courage to deliver the big projects and not be hijacked by the minority groups or the extreme greens. The road networks in rural and regional Queensland are the arteries that provide connectivity between our towns and in many cases are the only travel option for our residents. These roads allow our resources and produce to be delivered to ports and markets in our metropolitan areas. The point I want to make here is that roads in rural and regional Queensland are the links by which our communities survive and prosper, and the Burdekin is no exception. Whilst I am pleased to see that the previously LNP-funded Bruce Highway road projects at Sandy Gully and Yellow Gin Creek have been approved, which will improve flood immunity at these locations, I am bitterly disappointed that priority road projects such as Stuart Drive in Townsville and the Haughton River bridge project on the Bruce Highway have been omitted and that we will have to wait even longer to see these much needed projects delivered. I have publicly stated that the Haughton River bridge is the most

dangerous bridge on the Bruce Highway. It floods during the wet season and with its narrow width and lack of side rails, it poses a significant risk to motorists. Stuart Drive in Townsville is acknowledged by the department as a priority road project. It was the subject of a petition that I presented in this very parliament. Given the traffic volumes, proximity to schools and sporting ovals and lack of pedestrian crossing infrastructure, it is in urgent need of a major upgrade.

I also want to mention the Bowen Developmental Road and the need to complete the sealing of the remaining 40 kilometres of the unsealed section of this road. Unfortunately, two lives were lost on this road earlier this year. Given the impending development of the Galilee Basin and increased traffic volumes, particularly heavy vehicles, there is a need to expedite this work. The new Burdekin bypass is also a priority project for this area. When one considers that the government is spending \$43.7 million this year on rehabilitation of the current bridge, one can begin to understand why. The bypass will be one of the largest road infrastructure projects in Queensland's history and it is imperative that a preferred option be settled upon so that detailed planning and design can move forward. The residents of Home Hill, Ayr and Brandon should no longer have to put up with heavy vehicles motoring through their suburban streets 24 hours a day.

I also want to acknowledge the funding made available for the construction of an overtaking lane on the Bruce Highway between Alligator Creek Road and Allendale Drive. As a former member of the LNP government's Bruce Highway transport advisory committee, I am pleased to see that the government is continuing with the rollout of overtaking lanes along the length of the Bruce Highway and the widening of the centre median strip.

I want to spend some time talking about the recently released Northern Australia and agricultural white papers and what they potentially mean to my area in the Burdekin and the broader North Queensland region. The \$500 million National Water Infrastructure Development Fund was a key commitment in the *Agricultural competitiveness white paper*, which was set to accelerate investment in crucial water projects. I have to say that I have some of the biggest water projects in Queensland. I am talking about the development of the Urannah Dam, Elliot Main Channel and the raising of the Burdekin Falls Dam. Collectively these three projects have the potential to change the face of North Queensland. If you add in the development of the Galilee Basin and associated railway line to Abbot Point, construction of a base load power station at Collinsville and the expansion of the Townsville State Development Area, you begin to appreciate the importance of this area to Queensland. Collectively these projects have the potential to create thousands of jobs and inject hundreds of millions of dollars into the Queensland economy, yet what we are seeing in these budget documents is an ambiguous statement—

The Queensland Government is considering bringing forward a number of proposals for economic infrastructure in North Queensland that may potentially be supported under the Australian Government's \$5 billion Northern Australia Infrastructure Fund.

Let me say unequivocally that instead of considering it, the government should be doing it because the money is available and we should be tapping into this funding now. This is about vision. If we are to develop Northern Australia into the food bowl of South-East Asia, we need to be moving forward with these projects and chasing private investment to ensure that we are well positioned to develop agriculture, horticulture and new resource industries in the area.

I would again like to raise how important the development of an all-tide access boat ramp at Molongle Creek is, particularly for Volunteer Marine Rescue. I will continue to advocate for our share of the \$30 million Marine Infrastructure Fund to ensure that this project is delivered. Access to the community at Cape Upstart is via this boat ramp, and I would hate to think what it would mean if Volunteer Marine Rescue were unable to access the ocean in the event of an emergency because of low tide restrictions.

We all know the prevalence of cyclones in the north, and I have long lobbied for a cyclone shelter at Home Hill. During wet weather events the communities of Ayr and Home Hill become separated, and there is an urgent need for a stand-alone shelter to be constricted at Home Hill at the state high school. I would like to think that a portion of the \$23 million made available through the Local Government Grants and Subsidies Program can be utilised for this much needed project. Can I also say, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I cannot recall any other high school in Queensland not having an undercover area for their students, which is currently the case at the Home Hill State High School. The added bonus of constricting a cyclone shelter at this school is that it could be utilised as an undercover area by students which, given the temperatures and the wet season, is certainly warranted. I have previously written to the Deputy Premier and the education minister and I hope they take this on board tonight, as the Home Hill community is now the only community of this size between Cooktown and Yeppoon without ready access to a cyclone shelter in wet weather events.

I also want to acknowledge the \$1 million commitment for the William Ross State High School Trade Skills Centre, a project that has been delivered via a funding agreement with the Australian government. This centre will help deliver the necessary trade skills to our next generation of tradies and provides a much needed alternative for our school students in the area. The William Ross State High School services an ever-expanding population to the south of Townsville, and I have no doubt that the impending development of Rocky Springs, just south of Townsville, will put added pressure on the need to plan and deliver an additional high school in this area in the coming years.

I also want to acknowledge the LNP's funding commitment for a replacement ambulance station at Collinsville, which will see the current station relocated to the Collinsville Hospital in a colocation arrangement. This will provide a much improved service to the people of Collinsville and make for a more efficient arrangement in terms of staff support.

The Abbot Point redevelopment is a signature project for North Queensland. This is a priority project of massive importance not only for Bowen but for the greater North Queensland region. I note in the budget that \$500,000 has been earmarked in this year's budget, which causes me some concern given that \$5½ million allocated to this project has been pushed forward into the 2016-17 financial year. So I ask, Madam Deputy Speaker, is it the case that the government does not see this project going ahead for another 12 months? Because that would be at odds with the minister's public comments that the government is looking to proceed with this project as soon as possible.

Of particular concern to me, though, is the funding made available by this government to the Mackay Conservation Group, who work under the umbrella of the North Queensland Conservation Council. These groups are actively campaigning against the Abbot Point redevelopment and Carmichael Mine, which makes a mockery of the claims by the government that they are committed to these projects. Indeed, you would have every right to question whether this is the best use of taxpayers' dollars at a time when we are calling for infrastructure development in this state.

There is no doubting the importance of the Great Barrier Reef, and recent media attention highlights the need to ensure the government continues the good work of the previous LNP government in protecting and safeguarding the future of the reef. The funding made available in this year's budget to improve reef water quality, control pests and weeds and promote and enhance sustainable agriculture in the Burdekin region is indeed welcome.

The agricultural industry is the lifeblood of the Burdekin, and the potential that exists to develop this area into the food bowl of South-East Asia means that we need to ensure the appropriate mechanisms and farming practices are in place to meet all environmental requirements and conditions. This also extends to tackling the crown-of-thorns starfish, and I want to acknowledge the funding which will support the excellent research work currently being undertaken by the Australian Institute of Marine Science in developing sustainable options aimed at ridding the reef of this pest.

One may very well question the commitment of this government to infrastructure development when you consider the funding made available to the Townsville State Development Area. An allocation of \$250,000 in this year's budget from a total budget of \$9.7 million hardly sends a message of confidence to the Townsville and North Queensland business community regarding development of this site. The Townsville State Development Area on the southern outskirts of the city is an area of significance, given its access to utilities, road, rail and sea infrastructure and proximity to the city. The development of this area is a priority for Townsville and the broader North Queensland area and will augment existing industries in that area such as the copper refinery, Sun Metals Refinery and JBS Meatworks. There has been a lot of rhetoric around the development of this area, and I would urge the government to match the LNP commitment during the election campaign to develop this area, which has the potential to create several thousand jobs.

The government has promoted this budget as a jobs and infrastructure budget, and yet when I look at the detail it becomes obvious that infrastructure spending is sadly lacking and rural and regional areas such as the Burdekin have been neglected. I will continue to take up the fight on behalf of the hardworking people of the Burdekin electorate, and I will not give up until we get our fair share.