Speech By

Hon. Annastacia Palaszczuk

MEMBER FOR INALA

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Northern Australia Roads Program

Hon. A PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Premier and Minister for the Arts) (9.44 am): Tomorrow I will be taking the Working Queensland Cabinet Committee to Charters Towers. Already this year the Working Queensland Cabinet Committee has met in Townsville, Mackay, Mount Isa and Rockhampton. The full cabinet has also met in Gladstone and before the end of May I will be taking the Working Queensland Cabinet Committee to Cairns. Those meetings have been critical to discuss local opportunities and initiatives ahead of our budget in June.

My government knows the importance of our regions. My government also knows the importance of a safe and reliable transport network across the state. The 2015-16 to 2018-19 Queensland Transport and Roads Investment Program, known as QTRIP, provides for $18.8 billion in investment. QTRIP will support an average of approximately 15,000 direct jobs over the life of the program, not only delivering improved roads but also providing jobs and boosting our regional economies.

My government is working with all levels of government to improve our roads. Almost a year ago, the then Abbott government released the *White paper on developing northern Australia*, committing to a five-year $600 million Northern Australia Roads Program. In September, the government finally called for submissions. In response, in November last year the Minister for Main Roads wrote to the then deputy prime minister, Warren Truss, outlining Queensland's submission. I repeat: our submission of priority projects for northern Queensland was lodged in November last year. During the many months that have elapsed since we made our submission, Warren Truss retired, Andrew Robb bowed out and Tony Abbott lost his job.

Our priorities remain and the need of our communities and this great state remains. What we need is for the Turnbull government to respond without further delay. In all, Queensland has put forward 25 projects, seeking federal contributions of around $590 million on the appropriate 80-20 funding split. My government's submission focused on key freight routes such as the Flinders, Landsborough, Gregory, Peak Downs and Capricorn highways and the Gregory Developmental Road. We also included projects and packages in and around regional centres—Cairns, Townsville, Rockhampton, Emerald and Mount Isa—as well as regional roads connecting communities across northern Queensland. Importantly, this will include the progressive sealing of sections of the Hann Highway over the next five years. Those projects will improve our transport networks for the movement of people and goods, particularly for exports and tourism. Last year, Queensland exports increased by more than $5 billion to $49 billion.

We need the Turnbull government to actually do something for infrastructure in regional Australia. We should not have to wait until the federal budget. We certainly should not have to wait for the federal election. My government is committed to the north. The Pacific patrol boats are being built in the Indian Ocean, not at Cairns. The Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility legislation remains stuck in the

Senate and the funding, despite being pledged last year, cannot be accessed. Other key Northern Australia white paper funding programs, including Beef Roads and water infrastructure, need to be prioritised.

The Turnbull government has just called for nominations for its Beef Roads program. The nominations are due on 6 May, which is three days after the budget. The CRC announcement and the promise that the NAIF legislation will pass in the budget sittings are welcomed, but those are concessions that my ministers and Labor members have had to fight for. Severe cuts to federal health and education will impact on regional hospitals and schools. We need the Turnbull government to get its priorities straight. We need the Turnbull government to focus on regional Queensland.