



Speech By
Scott Stewart

MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

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**EDUCATION, TOURISM, INNOVATION AND SMALL BUSINESS COMMITTEE:
REPORT, MOTION TO TAKE NOTE**

 **Mr STEWART** (Townsville—ALP) (11.41 am): I move—

That the House takes note of the Education, Tourism, Innovation and Small Business Committee Report No. 18 *Consideration of Auditor-General's report No. 11: 2014-15—Maintenance of public schools.*

I acknowledge the work of the secretariat staff and the members who served on the Education, Tourism, Innovation and Small Business Committee. The education department has 1,333 school campuses with 12,893 buildings on those sites, more than half of which were built before 1990. Schools are allocated funding for maintenance. Generally, that funding is broken down into what they call planned maintenance, which is preventative maintenance, and unplanned maintenance, which is reactionary maintenance. Schools have received that funding over many years. As we know, it costs a lot of money to maintain old schools. Those of us who have owned an old Queenslander can attest to that. They seem to be a money pit, as can be the schools in our communities.

Each year, a school will undergo a BAS annual maintenance and audit process. A team of people will come into the school and pour over it, looking for defects. They will then report back to the school on what those defects are. In 2012, the department had backlog maintenance worth \$298 million, with 84 per cent of schools reporting that backlog being over 25 years old. At that time, the former Newman government decided it would fix the backlog and allocated an initial \$200 million for maintenance works. They decided to inject an additional \$100 million over three years to further reduce the total \$300 million backlog.

As a former principal, I know that schools had a choice to either use the Building and Asset Services, formerly known as QBuild, or go direct to market, DTM, which was fantastic for schools. It gave them the responsibility to make some great decisions. In my former school, we used direct to market. In the first year we were told that we had to organise that ourselves. I could have done it myself, but I chose to hand the job to my business services manager. As the Minister for Education has already highlighted, they are the hardest working people in our schools. We received feedback that we should work together to reduce the burden on business services managers by employing a project manager. We worked with a number of other schools to employ a project manager to work across the schools to get the outcomes that we needed.

The catch with fixing the backlog was that you could use the maintenance money only to fix backlog maintenance issues. That was good in theory, but in practice it did not work. We found that there was growing maintenance that had to be repaired out of additional money, usually school funds. Most schools simply let emerging issues sit, unless they are extremely urgent and need to be fixed. It is a bit like the old Queenslander house: you maintain the battles that you know need to be fixed. You do not necessarily fix the old problems first and then move to the next one; you repair the ones that you decide are the most urgent.

What was the outcome of all of that? On the one hand, principals were told to be autonomous, to step out and do creative things; then they were told that they had to fix the backlog of maintenance problems. When considering the \$300 million investment to fix \$298 million worth of backlog maintenance, the report indicates that a further \$232 million worth of maintenance grew because we could not fix the new maintenance issues and \$300 million of maintenance backlog remained outstanding. The end result was that the \$300 million investment equated to a \$35 million improvement in school maintenance. That is not a good return on investment given that the government spent \$300 million for a \$35 million return on investment. It was a good concept, but unfortunately it was not well thought out.