




Speech By
Aaron Harper

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

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

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (5.00 pm): I have been looking forward to adding something positive to this debate. It is with a sense of pride and excitement that I rise today to speak on and support the 2017-18 state budget handed down by Treasurer Curtis Pitt this week and outline how it will positively affect my electorate of Thuringowa. You will not be able to take the smile off my dial.

As a fellow regional MP, our Treasurer certainly gets it. He is acutely aware of the challenges his closest neighbour, the city of Townsville, has endured in the last two years following what was possibly the worst start for any new government in 2015—that is, dealing with major issues affecting our proud yet resilient city. The main ingredients for those major issues were these. The first was the LNP Newman-Nicholls term of government. They sacked 14,000 people. The member for Kawana talked about the increasing cost of living. There was a 43 per cent increase in power prices. What did that do? It drove down business and consumer confidence and increased unemployment.

Another ingredient was the mining and resources downturn. We are now seeing some positive change following this Labor government's investment in the north-west minerals province and the Surat and Galilee basins, and Adani's recent announcement in Townsville. This has provided a real shot of confidence for this vitally important sector. We endured the QNI industrial disaster in 2016. I say the 'disaster' because it was not just the 800 direct employees who lost their jobs who were affected, but thousands of others in our city—those involved with logistics, maintenance and supply.

There were also successive failed wet seasons, causing drought conditions. I know that you will appreciate this, Mr Deputy Speaker Millar. They affect the very heart and soul of North Queenslanders. Without water many industries struggle. The mining, agricultural, tourism, construction and landscaping industries have been severely affected. All of these things combined have contributed to high unemployment rates. We have seen crime issues challenging our communities.

I am proud to say that the Palaszczuk Labor government has had the guts, the drive and the sheer determination to respond to every challenge thrown at us. I therefore acknowledge our Premier, Deputy Premier, Treasurer and all government ministers for their passion, determination and sheer will to make positive change through a range of programs and funding like those aimed at restoring front-line nursing, teaching and emergency service jobs.

Other such programs and funding include: the accelerated capital works program; Skilling Queenslanders for Work, with 4,300 jobs across Queensland; the Back to Work youth boost payments, creating 642 jobs locally; the \$21 million Works for Queensland program ensuring councils get projects out the door and create more local jobs—over 6,000 in Queensland; North Queensland's first regional plan, paving the way forward for our region; the \$250 million North Queensland Stadium creating 750 jobs, something I am passionate about; the \$35 million Riverway Drive duplication—promised by those opposite but not delivered; we got it done under our watch, and it will create over 100 jobs—\$8.5 million in public housing projects creating over 300 jobs for tradies; and the \$6 million for the Kirwan State High School hall, which has gone to tender and is going to create more jobs.

I am pretty rapt with the \$5 million commitment for a new ambulance station for Kirwan. After 27 years in that profession I am pretty proud to have delivered that under my watch. It was promised by the former LNP government, but they failed to deliver it. There is funding for 20 more police officers for our two Queensland Police Rapid Action and Patrol Group hubs, one of which is located in Thuringowa.

I have saved the best for last. There is a \$692 million infrastructure budget for water security and renewable electricity transmission for Townsville. Of that, \$225 million has been allocated for water infrastructure to respond to our proud city's water security. This is a massive shot of confidence. It will restore business and investment confidence for North Queensland's major regional city. It fits in perfectly with this Labor government's \$386 million focus on North Queensland with our Powering North Queensland Plan. Out of that, \$236 million has been allocated to the Burdekin Falls Dam for a hydro-electric power station and improvement works and a study to assess options for hydro-electric power.

Some \$225 million has been set aside to ensure the state is prepared to act on the findings of the intergovernmental water task force and support sustainable and secure long-term water supply and security for Townsville. Another important funding commitment is the \$150 million set aside to connect the 11 renewable projects in the north, like the hydro-electric power scheme, through strategic transmission infrastructure. This totals a massive \$689 million commitment in infrastructure projects for Townsville. Importantly, these works are estimated to support thousands of jobs.

Along with the significant funding of \$935 million in North Queensland health, there is \$43 million for our schools, approximately \$90 million for northern regional roads and a separate \$50 million Back to Work regional employment package. All of these Palaszczuk Labor government initiatives are jobs building. We will see some 3,300 jobs created for Townsville. That is excellent given what we have been through.

Put simply, this is certainly great news for my electorate of Thuringowa. I again thank our Premier and Treasurer and all ministers for steering us through the tough times and investing in North Queensland with this battlers and builders state budget. It is truly a Labor budget that we can all be proud of because it means we are putting people first.

I cannot go on without responding to what the member for Clayfield said this morning. All the initiatives I have outlined are in stark contrast to what the opposition leader announced today. It was a shocker. There was not one cent for water security in Townsville. There was nothing about pipelines and nothing about the Burdekin Dam.

An opposition member interjected.

Mr HARPER: I will take the interjection about dams. Those opposite talk about building a new dam—

An opposition member interjected.

Mr HARPER: I will take the interjection. They talk about building a new dam. Can I suggest the entire frontbench of the opposition hop in a car and go for a drive up the highway and actually visit Townsville, but do not stop because no-one will talk to them. Turn left onto the Flinders Highway and turn left again at Mingela and get out. There is a big dam out there called Burdekin Falls Dam. That is our water security. Nearly two million megalitres of water is sitting there. We have the money on the table and we know that we will deliver this through our plan. We will connect that to Townsville. That is our plan.

An opposition member interjected.

Mr HARPER: You have absolutely no idea. You live in the south-east. It is going to create jobs. Where is the detail around dams? Where is their coal-fired power station going to go? How much is that going to cost—\$2 billion? Will it take 10 years to build like their dam? Where is the detail? They have nothing. Give us some detail.

I have to respond to commentary of the opposition leader around One Nation. He said there will be no deals with One Nation. Really? But they were willing to do preference deals on a seat-by-seat basis. What is it going to be? Is it deal or no deal? They have nothing.

This afternoon the member for Everton talked about the police in Townsville. There were no solutions. It was all talk and no action. We talked about the 20 extra police we are getting for the rapid action patrol hub. How do I know that? I know that because I have been there and I have spoken with them. I even did a night shift with them. They told me they needed extra staff and we delivered. What did those opposite do? They did nothing. They did not staff it properly from the start. They are all talk and no action. Talk is cheap. We are delivering.

I say to anyone on the crossbench or anyone who wants to oppose this budget: go to Townsville and tell 200,000 people that they do not deserve \$689 million worth of infrastructure that is going to connect electricity and give them water security for the rest of their days. Go and tell them that.

Mr Hart interjected.

Mr HARPER: You laugh now. You sit here in your cosy little South-East Queensland corner seat. You have absolutely no idea. I would like to end on a more positive note.

Mr Watts: 'I resign!'

Mr HARPER: No. I will be here for a while, champion. You only have to take a trip along Thuringowa Drive to see the impact of the Queensland government's commitments and what we have been delivering which has also sparked private investment. Let us take a trip. Strap in, everyone. We are going for a ride and I will provide the commentary. It might be a school hall on the left, an ambulance station on the right, public housing on the left, a new road on the right—Riverway Drive, and we will end up at the dam. I have so much to talk about, but I do not have time. I seek leave to have the remainder of my speech incorporated in *Hansard*.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Millar): Has the member had the remainder of his speech checked by the Deputy Speaker, sent an electronic version to Hansard and presented a hard copy for tabling?

Mr HARPER: It has all been done, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Leave granted.

From major road intersection (roundabout) upgrades you will be at the base of Dalrymple Road heading onto Thuringowa Drive, look Right to see the \$40M Dalrymple Road upgrade providing all weather access on what was once impassable in wet seasons (oh, how we miss them!).

Following this road upgrade we have seen significant development with Parkside residential development of Greater Ascot and I certainly acknowledge local developer Peter Tapiolas' faith to see these types of developments through in what have been tough times in Townsville—because it became a catalyst for further development and investment in Thuringowa. Directly across the road from that development is a new Catholic Education Primary School. St Benedict's is underway right now (more local jobs) with our Government committing \$6M to help get this underway.

Just up the road is the Townsville RSPCA who do an amazing job in our city, caring for abandoned and sadly sometimes mistreated animals. They were recent recipients of \$30,000 from the Gambling Community Benefit Fund to get them a new Van to continue a mobile service. More importantly they have received \$1.5M in funding over the next 4 years to ensure they continue to provide this worthwhile service.

Of course the Dalrymple Road upgrade links onto the \$200M Stage 4 of the Townsville Ring Road, recently completed of which our State Government contributed a further \$40M.

But let's head back along Thuringowa Drive. We see the extension of Greenwood Park Sporting Complex and new lights, thanks to the Get Playing Fund and the Community Gambling Benefit Fund.

What is that up ahead, you may ask? On the Right side you will see the old Thuringowa Council Chambers where a new private hospital is being planned for construction = investment and jobs!

On the Left you will see the Kirwan State High School which is the State's third largest School which recently received \$6M in funding for a well-deserved multipurpose Hall, which is out to Tender! Awesome, Mr Speaker. More Jobs!

Oh, look Left everyone. It is the nearly 40 Year Old Queensland Ambulance Station at Kirwan, which recently in this budget received \$5M to be redeveloped to ensure we provide the facilities for our frontline staff. Thank you to our Health and Ambulance Services Minister—an outstanding result that the LNP only spoke about but failed to deliver. I am so proud of this outcome for a profession I have been a part of for 27 years.

Eyes on the road everyone! Up ahead on the Left is the almost completed 12 unit \$3.5M Public Housing units we will shortly name the Ken McElligott House (a former Member for Thuringowa) which created 120 jobs and will focus on disability access. Thank you, Minister de Brenni!

On the Right side we see more private sector investment with Dexus Willows Shoppingtown redevelopment going into Stage 2, demonstrating a real \$70M show of confidence in Thuringowa.

Let's stop at a major intersection before starting the trip along the now famous Riverway Drive. Look Right everyone. It is Hervey's Range Road. It received \$7.2M in Road upgrades and the private investment of Harris Crossing and Mount Margaret residential developments are another real show of investment and confidence.

Mr Speaker, down Hervey Range Road that is the Brothers Leagues Club which like the JRL complex received \$100,000 in funding for lighting and facilities upgrades, via our Queensland Government Get Playing Fund, and they have employed 7 new staff thanks to the Back to Work Youth Boost, just like that place over there! Pitstop Karting, with 2 new employees. G'day, Dale Dunston and crew!

On the Right Hand side is our magnificent Riverway Precinct, home of many Community & Cultural events like India Fest, Greek Fest, African Fest, NAIDOC Day celebrations and the Pacifica event, just to name a few. Only a few weeks ago we hosted the 5th Annual Weetbix challenge where nearly 800 Kids participated.

Mr Speaker, Thanks to "Works for Queensland fund" going directly to Councils across Queensland, I know those kids will have less risk of sunburn during the swim leg of the Triathlon thanks to \$1M going to shade sails which will cover the pools at Riverway.

As we head out of the Riverway Precinct, we look across the road at the Queensland Police Rapid Action Patrol Hub, which has seen major policing operations: Oscar Merchant and Papa Advance which has resulted a reduction in crime rates that have affected our community for some years now.

As released in this year's budget, there are 20 more police for the QPS RAP Hub. Thank you, Police Minister Mark Ryan. QPS received more Police which is a real boost to the troops we have located in Townsville and continue to reduce crime rates that have directly affected our community.

QPS RAP Hub is also home to the Townsville Stronger Communities Group which is our Whole of Government Team, working with affected individuals and families with intensive case management. We know this has also significantly reduced the rates of property and motor vehicle offences and is well supported by our Government.

Now let's turn Left onto Riverway Drive, and looking to the Right side we see yet another crane helping build another \$5.5M x 16 Unit Public Housing complex, which has delivered over 200 jobs during the life of the project to local tradespeople. Thank you, Minister de Brenni.

This activity has sparked more private investment, Mr Speaker, because just up the road is another new Lancini Property and Development of a new Zarraffa's coffee store and takeaway which is being built again by local tradies!

As we head up the road, we look onto the Riverbank which spans nearly 10km, and we see 40 workers who, thanks to Skilling Queenslanders for Work funding of \$718,000, are undertaking beautification works, with Townsville City Council and Gtec training company. They are not only learning new Skills, Mr Speaker; they are also lifting civic pride of the area, and who knows, Mr Speaker, this work ready unit could one day be working on the \$250M North Queensland Stadium providing over 750 jobs for locals.

Now back along the road and we see major roadworks signs up ahead on Riverway Drive. The Premier has recently attended these \$35M roadworks and was quoted as saying, "There is not a Member of the Queensland Parliament that has not heard of Riverway Drive!"

How true is that statement, Mr Speaker? Yes, the Premier joined me very recently to help turn the first sod on what is Thuringowa's largest infrastructure spend in years. Some 24,000 people live in the area and over 20,000 cars use this major arterial road which is in \$35M Stage 1 of duplication of Riverway Drive between a 3 klm section of Gollogly and Allambie lanes.

It was the number 1 priority for locals and I am proud to have delivered it, Mr Speaker. Even Thuringowa should be proud to know that I will continue to put people first and fight for more funding for the Stage 2 Duplication.

Mr Speaker, this is so much more than a road upgrade. I formed a local Community consultation group over a year ago—"Hello Upper Ross Community Voice champions"—and they have provided feedback direct to TMR which resulted in helping achieve an increased scope of works and an increase funding of \$5M, taking the project from \$30M to \$35M as it now has increased pedestrian access, boardwalks, lighting, car parking for user groups, all adding to the overall increase of civic pride of the area.

At one of those meetings we had briefings from 2 developers who are investing in the area. Wingate & Payce Developers' brand-new Riverstone residential development will see another 1200 homes in their \$500M residential development in the Upper Ross.

This of course means more travelling families along our major road, Riverway Drive, and they will now be able to shop in a new multimillion Riverway Shopping Plaza as a result of the Manolis Family owned Development. At one of those community meetings Mr Charlie Manolis gave his commitment to upgrade their facilities, which is yet another show of confidence and investment in the area.

Mr Ben Griffin, representing the Griffin Group who have 3 other major developments in Townsville, is leading the Project and the first Development Application has been submitted to Council. I see more jobs, Mr Speaker, on this existing project and I know through my very positive interactions with the owner and Ben Griffin that this project is also going ahead, largely because of the Riverway Drive road Duplication which will significantly change access to and from the current shopping facility. As the local Member, I certainly welcome this investment in the Upper Ross area.

We are back in the car, Mr Speaker, and have nearly arrived at the Ross River Dam.

Mr Speaker, Water Security is a priority for Townsville, so I am so pleased to see water infrastructure funding of \$225M being included in this State Budget.

Beside the Dam, we have the \$225M Ross Solar Farm, a 235MW facility being started and will provide enough renewable energy to power 55,000 homes and during its construction will employ over 230 jobs. Mr Speaker, I must acknowledge and thank ESCO Palisade for their investment in Thuringowa.

This massive renewable facility will plug directly into the Ross Substation in Kelso, which our Government is investing \$3.5M to upgrade this facility. It is great timing as this will assist in connecting the Ross Solar Farm.

This is all great timing as it is all going to be connected to the Premier's recent announcement of Powering North Queensland where a massive \$386M will be spent in connecting our North Queensland's 11 renewable projects, therefore increasing local supply and decreasing transmission of power up the Queensland coast from the South East. And importantly, Mr Speaker, this investment is estimated to create thousands of jobs.

Mr Speaker, this is a major investment in North Queensland!

I liken it to North Queensland's Micro Grid, ensuring electricity generated in North Queensland remains in North Queensland!

Beside the Ross farm is the Thuringowa RSL and Bartlett Park Rodeo grounds. Both of these local well-known community organisations have received over \$60,000 in funding between them from our Community Gambling Benefit Fund. The reaction from the RSL for their new Solar project has saved them over 3000 per month in electricity costs and their neighbours at Bartlett Park can now have a new bore and lighting.

Mr Speaker, it is time to go home now, turn the car around and head back to the family in Kelso. I am immensely proud of the work done to date in what is relatively still a new Labor government, who are putting people first and we know are looking after Townsville.

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I commend the Treasurer's Budget. It is simply outstanding and a real investment for the people of Thuringowa.

I support the Bill.