




Speech By
Andrew Cripps

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

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

 **Mr CRIPPS** (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (7.40 pm): One positive thing I can say about the Palaszczuk government's 2017-18 state budget is that it is the prettiest set of budget papers that I have ever seen. We have lots of bright colours and glossy photos. Unfortunately, what is contained in Labor's budget is far from pretty. In fact, for North Queensland and the Hinchinbrook electorate it is an ugly budget. While the Palaszczuk government's overheated jobs rhetoric is splashed all over it, all Labor's budget has delivered for the Hinchinbrook electorate is a cold shoulder.

I have now seen 11 budgets handed down but, sadly for North Queensland, I cannot recall one so bereft of new investment in the Hinchinbrook electorate as this effort from the member for Mulgrave. For example, there is not a single new capital allocation in the Cassowary Coast region or Hinchinbrook shire worthy of inclusion in the glossy action plans for Townsville or Far North Queensland. The one item in the Hinchinbrook shire that did get listed in the Townsville Action Plan is funding for the Cattle and Frances Creek bridges on the Bruce Highway south of Ingham, but that was first announced in last year's budget. Furthermore, 80 per cent of it comes from the federal government and construction is already well underway on the site. Indeed, this project was first identified several years ago as part of the former LNP government's Bruce Highway Action Plan.

Apart from that, the Hinchinbrook shire and the Cassowary Coast region have been completely abandoned by Labor in terms of new capital investment in this budget. On Townsville's northern beaches the story is marginally better. The budget contains a new \$7.5 million project to upgrade and widen the Bruce Highway between Deep Creek and Bluewater Creek; however, it must be pointed out again that 80 per cent of the funds for this Bruce Highway project come from the federal government. There are no other road projects listed in Labor's capital statement for the Hinchinbrook electorate.

The funds in this budget to complete the construction of a new state school at Burdell confirm an allocation that is also not new. It first appeared in the 2015-16 budget two years ago. Since 2011, I have worked hard to deliver it after exposing the fact that, despite being in office for 20 years and despite significant residential growth in the area, Labor had secured no land and had no plans to provide the education infrastructure for this area.

The budget also contains a new \$1.2 million allocation to upgrade the multipurpose hall at Bohlevale State School. This was announced some time ago. This is a very large state primary school with about 890 students and about 100 staff. However, this is not the only urgent issue at Bohlevale State School and it is not the only school on Townsville's northern beaches that deserves some attention in this budget. The traffic management situation at the Bohlevale State School has reached an unacceptable situation; it is dangerous. I know that Education Queensland and the Department of Transport and Main Roads know about it, because I have been onsite on more than one occasion with representatives of both departments along with the Townsville City Council. This unsafe situation for the students and staff at the school really needs to be addressed.

I am also disappointed that Bluewater State School has been overlooked in this budget. This is also a growing school with ageing infrastructure that needs to be upgraded. I submitted a proposal to the Premier in January 2016 when she was casting around for things to do as part of her Accelerated Works Program in North Queensland. I got a response from the Education Minister which rejected that proposal, and I have heard nothing since. Bluewater State School has been growing in recent years and now has over 400 students. It needs new permanent classrooms to replace existing temporary and demountable buildings, a new school hall to help with the growing demand for after-school care and a new administration block to replace the current one which dates from 1962. There is also a need to look at the traffic management arrangements at Bluewater State School.

There has been a lot of crowing from ministers and Labor MPs from Townsville about what Townsville's supposedly got out of the budget. With double-digit unemployment having endured in Townsville for more than 12 months and youth unemployment in Townsville at 20 per cent, the Palaszczuk government's third budget should be scrutinised for what it delivers now and how effective Labor policies have been at addressing this issue.

There is a fair bit of political spin associated with Labor's budget for Townsville. I have looked at what is actually in the capital statement for this coming year against the backdrop of these shocking unemployment figures I mentioned earlier. All the gushing media releases about apparent budget allocations need to be taken into consideration in that most of the promised expenditure will not take place for several years or is not new funding at all.

The reported \$936 million for Health in North Queensland is a far cry from the \$29 million that is actually in the capital statement. This includes a \$5 million clinical services redevelopment, \$1.6 million to relocate breast screening services, \$2.6 million for the paediatric unit, \$8.5 million for the ongoing Townsville Hospital expansion, \$6.7 million for health technology equipment, and \$4.7 million of minor projects and acquisitions.

While a lot of people are getting excited about the \$225 million allocation for Townsville's water security, the Palaszczuk government's budget papers indicate that Labor plans to spend only \$10 million in the next 12 months. That is about four per cent of the total budget. Interestingly, the water task force has yet to report or provide any recommendations about a preferred approach to resolving this critical issue.

There is no doubt that the North Queensland Stadium is a significant project for Townsville but, after years of talking, only 18.4 per cent or \$46 million is budgeted to be spent over the next 12 months. This item has been in the Palaszczuk government's budget three years in a row with various levels of funding and includes \$100 million from the federal government.

In the same way that the Cattle and Frances Creek Bridge projects on the Bruce Highway south of Ingham were announced last year and are not new funding, the federal government is providing 80 per cent of the funding for the Burdekin River Bridge project on the Bruce Highway between Ayr and Home Hill. These items pad out the Palaszczuk government's budget for North Queensland but they can take little credit for them. Despite the serious unemployment problem in Townsville and North Queensland, most of the items in Labor's third budget have already been announced, will not be spent for years or are significantly funded by another level of government. A lot of promises have been made to Townsville and North Queensland in this budget, but it needs to be pointed out that most of the funding has been put off until after the next election.

While the Palaszczuk government's Jobs for Queensland rhetoric is plastered all over these glossy budget papers, for Townsville and North Queensland youth unemployment remains a very serious matter. Labor is fond of talking up its Skilling Queenslanders for Work program, but it has not been successful in driving down youth unemployment rates in Townsville and North Queensland. I wrote to the skills and training minister and the employment minister in February 2016 to point out that the Skilling Queenslanders for Work program was rejecting applications from service providers with very high employment outcome rates.

The Ultimate Rural Training Centre at Alice River near Townsville is operated by well-respected local rural trainers Geoff and Vicki Toomby, and they get excellent outcomes. These ministers wrote back to me saying that the cost per participant was too high at the Ultimate Rural Training Centre, and I argued that outcomes were more important and that Geoff and Vicki Toomby achieve upwards of 80 per cent employment placement for students who complete their course. With 20 per cent youth unemployment still biting hard in Townsville, Labor needs to review their Skilling Queenslanders for Work program.

The LNP has committed to implement our plan to get Queenslanders working, with a targeted package of support for businesses and workers that will lead to jobs and opportunities, especially for young Queenslanders. This package includes the Queensland Apprenticeship Boost, the Tools for Tradies initiative, the Job Start Incentive and the Employment Bonus payment which will make a difference to youth unemployment.

Palaszczuk government MPs are also fond of reading out endorsements from mayors and councils from across Queensland about its so-called Works for Queensland program. I would be very surprised if any mayor or any council would say anything other than 'thank you very much' when the state government rings up out of the blue and throws a cheque for millions of dollars at them as long as they can spend it before November.

So completely and utterly clueless about how to grow the economy, so absolutely and tragically without any ideas of their own to create jobs, this indolent cabinet just decided to write out cheques to local councils across Queensland, because Labor have no plan of its own. The Palaszczuk government effectively subcontracted out part of its Capital Works Program to local government, because it is simply not up to the job.

Speaking of not being up to the job, the budget papers associated with the Department of Natural Resources and Mines are a pretty sad reflection on the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines. After two years of trading on the strong long-term investment by the former LNP government, the announced funding under the Palaszczuk government for two key departmental programs are a bitter disappointment. In the 2013-14 state budget the former LNP government invested a record \$80 million over five years in the Queensland Natural Resource Management Program. This program focused on three priorities: controlling pest weeds and feral animals; improving water quality outcomes; and supporting sustainable agriculture. Since then it has achieved very strong natural resource management outcomes.

Labor has traded on that investment over the last two years. Now when it comes to renewing that investment in that program we see the commitment slashed to \$42.3 million over just four years. That means the Queensland NRM program has been effectively slashed by one-third in terms of funding and the investment horizon for Queensland's NRM groups has been reduced. This is an appalling outcome under this minister.

What makes this savage cut to the Queensland NRM program all the more extraordinary is the constant rhetoric we hear from the Palaszczuk government about how concerned it is about the environment. Yet, when it comes to delivering the funding to do good works on the ground managing our natural resources, it was Cripps and not Lynham who came good to the benefit of Queensland's environment.

The other short-sighted investment outcome from the Palaszczuk government is the funding allocated to the Strategic Resources Exploration Program. Labor has announced a \$20 million commitment over four years—effectively about \$5 million a year. The fact is that Labor has been trading on the former LNP government's 2013-14 Future Resources Program investment for the last two years without any additional funding.

Government members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Elmes): Just one moment, member for Hinchinbrook. I would remind members on my right of standing order 244 which talks about people standing in the aisles. I would remind the member for Stretton that if he wishes to interject he should do so from his own seat.

Mr CRIPPS: It is okay, Mr Deputy Speaker, I do not mind. I am a big boy now. The current minister has not delivered any additional funding for the Future Resources Program in the last two Labor budgets and has effectively bludged off the \$30 million allocation that the LNP put in place in 2013-14. The exploration results that he has periodically reported to the House over the last two years are the direct result of the projects that I funded through the LNP's Future Resources Program.

Over the last two years we have heard ministerial statement after ministerial statement from the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines about all the things happening in the north-west minerals province, the Cooper Basin and elsewhere, but his dirty little secret was that these initiatives have all been made possible by the investment that the LNP made in 2013-14. Now, sadly, when it has finally come time for renewing that investment in the Future Resources Program, Minister Lynham has come up short.

So desperate was the minister to create an illusion that he had actually secured something meaningful in this third Labor budget, on Tuesday he issued a press release announcing the entire departmental budget as an investment in the next generation resource projects and jobs. Unfortunately, these program cuts that I have outlined in the NRM program and the Future Resources Program tell the real story about what is happening inside the once proud Department of Natural Resources and Mines.

However, it is not only in the Natural Resources and Mines portfolio where the LNP's achievements are still delivering better outcomes than anything Labor has achieved. In the State Development portfolio, the LNP's landmark Royalties for Regions initiative is still kicking goals in rural and regional Queensland, with \$38½ million spent last year and \$28½ million to be spent this year. Amazingly, \$22.3 million will be spent in the year after that.

The common denominator here of course is the Minister for State Development. The Minister for State Development, the member for Stafford, has tried to discredit the Royalties for Regions program while continuing to approve funds for great projects that the LNP allocated in the first instance. Labor's smaller, shorter and narrower Building our Regions program is a limping, lethargic, lacklustre shadow of the Royalties for Region program, to the ongoing embarrassment of the Minister for State Development.

I am delighted that in April last year the LNP committed to re-establishing the Royalties for Regions initiative, including reinstating the previous level of funding that has been slashed by the Palaszczuk government. Communities in regional and rural Queensland will once again be able to access funding for important community building projects that will have both economic and social benefits. I am proud of that commitment.

Speaking of embarrassing ministers, I have not overlooked my ongoing quest to work out what on earth the Minister Assisting the Premier on North Queensland is responsible for. I searched the Capital Statement, but there was nothing there. I searched the Budget Measures, but there was nothing there. I searched the Service Delivery Statements for the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and, lo and behold, I found the title of the minister on page 1.

Excited, I threw myself into the SDS, certain that after the third budget of the Palaszczuk government I would finally find what the blazes the Minister Assisting the Premier on North Queensland actually does. Page 5 mentions what the department does to support the minister. Page 5 also reveals what the minister has in terms of staff allocated to her. The SDS carries details of the minister's office expenses for the last financial year and an estimate for the coming financial year.

Imagine then my utter devastation when, for the third year in a row, I turned the last page of the SDS for the Department of the Premier and Cabinet without any information whatsoever being provided to inform the parliament of Queensland or the people of Queensland about what the Minister Assisting the Premier on North Queensland has done, is doing or plans to do in that capacity. How could this possibly be in a modern democracy?

For three years the Minister Assisting the Premier on North Queensland has avoided, squibbed and evaded the basic tests of transparency and accountability that every other minister has been required to report against in terms of public scrutiny of their performance in the executive. The minister is not responsible for any legislation associated with this portfolio title, there are no budget allocations associated with this portfolio title and there are no public servants that she is accountable for.

Other ministers in this government are routinely forced to surrender ministerial statements from their own portfolios to ensure that the Minister Assisting the Premier on North Queensland periodically has something to say in this place. The minister then stands up and pretends that she had something remotely to do with whatever had been done in a desperate attempt to justify this contrived, vacuous, illegitimate ministerial title.

I want to conclude by acknowledging the positive budget commitments outlined by the Leader of the Opposition in his budget reply speech. The LNP's commitment to freezing motor vehicle registration for a period of three years if we are successful at the next election will be welcome relief after Labor has treated motorists like cash cows in recent years by increasing registration at twice the rate of inflation. I also acknowledge the new deal for regional Queensland that the LNP has previously committed to, including a 10-year action plan to improve the Bruce Highway, building new dams to provide water security and job-creating agricultural projects, a plan to provide ongoing support for our resources, fair vegetation management laws for farmers and the protection of a hard won right to marketing choice for canegrowers.

The Leader of the Opposition has described the Palaszczuk Labor government's third budget as a con job. 'Con' is a slang word for the act of swindling someone by first winning his or her confidence—in other words, it is a confidence trick. Regrettably, this is a perfect description of the Palaszczuk government's third budget.