




Speech By  
**Shane Knuth**

**MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE**

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Record of Proceedings, 16 June 2017

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

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—KAP) (8.41 pm): I rise to speak on the budget in 2017. We received \$250,000 to address the issue of sedge. Sedge has been a big issue for us. The previous agricultural minister came to the Tablelands to visit the farmers and see firsthand the devastation that sedge grass is causing to that region and the northern region. Sedge is a devastating weed that is costing the cattle industry and the dairy industry hundreds of thousands if not millions of dollars each year and it needs to be addressed.

We had a number of questions to the minister, and the Treasurer went up to have a look at it. It is disappointing to see the devastation caused by this weed. The cattle cannot eat it. If they do eat the sedge, it stays in their stomachs and they cannot digest it and they die. Even in a period of drought, amongst the springs, we see this nice looking green grass everywhere. Even though it is nice and green in the middle of a drought when everything else is dead, it is left there because the cattle cannot eat it. This has taken over the Atherton Tablelands. It is an insult to receive a lousy \$250,000 for something that is causing massive devastation right across the northern regions and is taking over our good grazing country. It is even taking over our football fields.

That \$250,000 was committed to the Tablelands Regional Council and the other councils, but that \$250,000 commitment by the state government will only be matched if the TRC can find \$250,000 from their budget and a further \$250,000 of private investment. Sedge impacts the fruit bowl of Queensland. The agricultural industries on the Tablelands are worth upward of \$500 million. Sedge will destroy all of these industries.

The TRC have already spent \$100,000 on sedge eradication, which is 44 per cent of their biosecurity budget on one weed. To raise this kind of money, the TRC will have to increase rates by four per cent across the entire council to fund the government's planned contribution. The TRC asked for \$1.5 million and they have been told to stump up half a million dollars for only \$250,000 in return. The TRC believe this is not feasible, given that they hand down their budget in five days and currently there is a parliamentary inquiry into the feasibility of local councils because of the deficits that local governments are currently running at. Sedge does not just affect the Tablelands Regional Council; it affects councils right across North Queensland.

It was quite insulting to receive only \$250,000 when it is a massively destructive weed. I hope the Minister for Agriculture and the Treasurer can come up with some sort of solution to this because it is impacting this whole region and it is devastating. We need to combat this. All they wanted was some funding for R&D through the department of agriculture and Biosecurity Queensland so they could find a way to kill the sedge and then combat the pre-emergent weed that is coming up. That is all they are asking for.

In regard to other funding in the budget, we appreciate the \$590,000 for the H block hall and tuckshop at Ravenshoe State School. That money comes through the School Infrastructure Enhancement Program. That is good dollars well spent, but we went to the school three years ago with

the P&C, and we worked with facilities Queensland and lobbied for that funding and it has taken three years to get that money. The Ravenshoe community, the Ravenshoe school, the principals, the past principals and the present and previous P&C are very appreciative of this money that has come to them. It did not come on a silver platter; there was a lot of work behind this.

I also acknowledge the money that will go towards B block at Yungaburra State School. This is another area where we worked very hard with the P&C, facilities Queensland and the minister. The prep room is too cluttered and they do not have a sick bay area. They have \$70,000 for the walkways going up to the school, which was falling to pieces. Those funds will go to that. We are very appreciative of that, but it is not something that was just pulled out of a hat; it is something that we worked extremely hard for.

There is \$280,000 to refurbish B block through the School Infrastructure Enhancement Program at Charters Towers. The P&C came down here and wrote to the government and the education department. They have secured some air conditioning and shade cover which is needed. The air conditioning was run down and some classrooms had no air conditioning at all. At the moment, the Charters Towers community are rejoicing because they have those funds. It is a similar story in that there was a lot of work behind this funding.

Millchester State School will receive \$285,000 to refurbish D block. This is important for the Charters Towers region because they are the hub of the education industry. There are three private schools, three primary schools—Millchester, Central and Richmond Hill—the School of Distance Education and the Charters Towers State High School. It is a hub of the education industry and it is very important that those funds go to that region.

I also acknowledge the \$6.1 million to replace the Atherton Police Station. Seven years ago, I walked into that police station and found that the station and the watch house were cluttered and the police could not carry out their police work. The police were unhappy because their conditions caused problems for them. When they were interviewing people who had not done the right thing by the law, everyone could listen to all of the conversations because that station was so cluttered. This is good for the Atherton Tablelands. We also have two extra police officers at Malanda who were inducted three weeks ago.

I also acknowledge the \$5 million upgrade to the section of the Flinders Highway between Charters Towers and Townsville. I am quite disappointed that the Irvinebank Road received \$595,000 to resheet it. It is very important that we upgrade and seal that road. We do not want to keep resheeting it. Year in and year out, the resheeting gets washed away. There are massive ruts in the road between Irvinebank and Petford. There have been five accidents in three months on that section of road. Cars that continually travel down that road bump themselves out of alignment and sustain a lot of damage. As I said, there are also serious accidents, all because of insufficient funding. All people want is for the bad sections of that 15-kilometre stretch of road, that is, four or five kilometres of it, to be sealed. They do not want it resheeted or graded, because the rocks project through the road. They just want the government to get in there and do the job properly. I have tabled a petition from 392 residents, which states—

Residents of the Atherton Tablelands draws to the attention of the House, the urgent upgrade required for the Herberton to Irvinebank Road. This road is a main arterial road connecting the communities of Watsonville and Irvinebank and extends through to Petford require immediate attention to upgrade the road to a sealed standard. Every year this road deteriorates to an unuseable standard that requires continuous grading however this causes rocks to project out through the road which leads to significant vehicle damage and unsafe driving. Herberton-Petford Road is also a designated school bus route that places children's lives at risk.

Since February this year there have been seven reported accidents. Five of the accidents resulted in personal injury. These statistics do not take into account unreported accidents. All road users fear for their safety when travelling this road due to the poor conditions.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the House to prioritise the immediate upgrade to a sealed standard for the Herberton to Irvinebank Road.

Although I tabled that petition this morning, I table it again.

*Tabled paper:* Nonconforming petition requesting the House to prioritise the immediate upgrade to a sealed standard for the Herberton to Irvinebank Road [[1035](#)].

There are not a lot of residents at Herberton, but the school bus travels down that road and picks up school kids. It costs up to \$20,000 each year to repair the damage done to that school bus because it travels on that road. The road is a shortcut from Herberton to Petford, from Herberton to Dimbulah and from Herberton to Chillagoe, saving up to 30 kilometres. That means fewer cars travelling through the Tablelands area, causing less damage to that road. Sealing the Irvinebank Road makes sense. We are sick of the crumbs. We want the black stuff. We want the road sealed.

My community has a lot of concerns about the funding that we receive, year in and year out. In the past 30 years, there were probably only one or two budgets that North Queenslanders have benefitted from. Robbie Katter, the member for Mount Isa, talked about a budget equity commission so that North Queensland can receive its fair share of funding. Two years ago, the Townsville and Cairns areas were \$500 million short in terms of the State Infrastructure Fund. We believe that there needs to be something tangible to ensure that there is a balance for our regions. In this parliament we fought for four extra seats in the redistribution, but those seats are now going to be in Brisbane. Obviously, that means that voting power and numbers are decreasing in the north and increasing in the south-east. North Queenslanders believe that we need a budget equity commission, because we want to see balanced funding.

When it comes to infrastructure, the government talks about the rail line under the Brisbane River, Cross River Rail, which is a project worth up to \$5 billion. As I said before, we seem to believe that the private sector must fund everything. However, all we need to do is build the \$2.5 billion railway in the Galilee Basin and up to 27,000 jobs would be created. We would own that railway line. We would have control of the Galilee Basin, which means royalties for life and transport haulage for life. Do we want to see Adani going to the federal government and the state government for royalty relief or do we want the money to build that railway track? Let us have the intestinal fortitude to make the decision to build the railway track.

We have a feasibility study for the Hell's Gate Dam, which is a tangible project that would breathe life into the North Queensland region in terms to jobs, water security and development in the region. The dam would gravity feed water to Townsville, resolving water supply problems there. It would gravity feed water to the Charters Towers region, opening up that area to more development. It would provide continuous water security to the Burdekin region. Instead, we are talking about upgrading the wall in the Burdekin Dam, which sounds great. As you lift up that water, you have to keep the hydropower generation operating, but in the north the landowners and irrigators need that water. There will be a lot of pressure for that operation to continue to provide 50 megawatts a year, which is not much in terms of power generation. You would still have to pump water uphill to Townsville to provide water security.

If we constructed the Hell's Gate Dam, water would be gravity fed to Townsville. The project would mean jobs for the Charters Towers and Townsville regions. It is much closer. Being able to gravity feed water would open up the area and provide water security to the Burdekin. It is a win, win, win for all. The Labor Party has decided not to take this option because they have a no-new-dams policy. They do not want to cop flak for building another dam so have had to find another option, which is to raise the dam wall. I do not know if we will even receive that funding. I am very disappointed that we are talking about this, because the Burdekin Dam is in my electorate. My community leaders and those in Townsville are pushing for the Hell's Gate Dam, so to see it being ignored is very disappointing.

North Queensland needs a budget equity commission so that we can have balanced funding. We also need to support jobs and water infrastructure within the region. I have had a lot of communication with the Department of Natural Resources about the Big Rocks Weir, which is a \$20 million project. It costs \$33 million to build an average bridge and we are looking at only \$20 million to construct the Big Rocks Weir, which would hold 10,000 megalitres of water. That project would provide opportunities for development and water security in the Charters Towers region. It is such a simple thing. We have a choice: of course we need bridges, but we could spend \$33 million on a new bridge or \$20 million on a weir that would provide water security and jobs for the region. Let us get out there, have a go and make an effort to do something. I wanted to bring those matters to the attention of the House.