




Speech By
Hon. Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

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

 **Hon. CW PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (8.52 pm): Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to make a contribution to this cognate debate, including the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill 2018. I want to make a couple of brief observations about the progress of the Queensland economy and the state's finances since the beginning of 2015. As I have said before, business investment is up, debt is lower, employment growth is higher and economic growth is higher than it was prior to that time. This budget continues the tradition of a focus on regional Queensland, with more than half of the infrastructure spend slated for areas outside of the greater Brisbane area. Queenslanders have reason to be optimistic about the future, with the state on a sustainable financial footing.

As we close on the 2017-18 financial year, the budget figures now provide a clear picture of the fiscal performance over the previous three years. The 2017-18 actual result locks in three successive surpluses since 2015-16: \$668 million, \$2.82 billion and \$1.51 billion respectively. These surpluses were achieved by this government whilst undertaking significant debt reduction under the Debt Action Plan. The aim of that plan was to pay down \$12 billion of general government sector debt over a decade. This aim was well and truly met and the debt reduction task has continued.

General government debt for 2017-18 is \$17 billion lower than forecast in the 2014-15 budget and non-financial public sector debt, or total debt, is over \$12 billion lower than projected. At the 2014-15 budget, general government sector debt was projected to be \$48.4 billion by 2017-18. The outcome of general government sector debt in 2017-18 was \$31.4 billion. This equates to a reduction of general government interest costs of over \$700 million per year.

For those who choose to use the non-financial public sector borrowings measure, as I mentioned there has also been debt reduction on this metric. At the 2014-15 budget, non-financial public sector borrowings were projected to be \$82.1 billion in 2017-18. Non-financial public sector debt is \$69.5 billion in 2017-18—\$12.6 billion lower than the 2014-15 forecast. On every debt measure debt will continue to be lower than it was prior to the beginning of 2015. This is one of the key reasons Moody's removed the negative watch that had been applied to our credit rating in 2012. I have every faith that the prudent fiscal management that has been in place since 2015 will continue. On that note, I congratulate the Deputy Premier on handing down her first budget. The first budget is always a memorable one.

In terms of the economy, I have always said that Queensland does well when our population growth rate exceeds the national average, and to that end it is very pleasing to see that the rate of population growth is doing just that. This was exactly the goal when I went down to Sydney and Melbourne to launch the Move Up in the World campaign. It seems that everyone is cottoning on that Queensland is the best part of Australia. We have more job opportunities, better weather, lower taxes and, I still believe, better Rugby League players. According to Treasury projections, the most recently introduced fiscal principle that growth in FTEs should not exceed the rate of population growth on average over the forward estimates has been achieved. This is pleasing, because it is in line, I think, with community expectations.

Employment growth has improved from 0.7 per cent in 2015-16 to come in at higher than forecast for 2016-17 to more than double at 1.8 per cent. The estimated actual employment growth for 2017-18 is more than 2½ times the forecast in last year's budget and is projected to continue strongly across the forward estimates. That is good news for Queensland jobseekers and a testament to the good work done under programs like Back to Work, including the Youth Boost, Skilling Queenslanders for Work, the Jobs and Regional Growth Fund, the Industry Attraction Fund and Works for Queensland. These are all job-creating or retaining programs that were introduced or re-enlivened last term. It is why we have seen the creation of more than net 156,000 new jobs since January 2015.

The overall business environment in Queensland has improved markedly since 2015. As we know, the private sector has an enormous role to play in driving our state's economy. Confidence is king, and improved investment only comes with the right international and domestic conditions. Last year's budget forecast business investment to begin climbing out of negative territory this financial year, but the estimated actual for 2017-18 has rocketed to 10¾ per cent. It is a great outcome for Queensland.

I want to now turn my attention to my region of Far North Queensland and my electorate of Mulgrave. The strong support and certainty provided by the Queensland government's tourism funding guarantee and hard work to create more direct flights through the Cairns International Airport is reaping dividends for the Tropical North as global tourism continues to grow. Cairns and Tropical North Queensland are on the doorstep of the largest growing middle class the world has ever known in Asia. It is a fact that the global tourism market is growing and it will continue to do so. Our challenge is how we capture our share of that growth—and more—and how to ensure that visitors stay longer and spend more. Going forward, we need to provide Cairns with the next generation of infrastructure to allow it to move to the next level as a global tourist destination.

This budget provides funding for existing commitments—either those made in previous budgets or as election commitments—as well as funding for new initiatives. It was pleasing to recently join the tourism minister, the member for Cairns and the member for Barron River to announce funding to develop the vision for the 76-kilometre Wangetti Trail, a big leap forward in terms of our ecotourism potential. The convention centre is already a jewel in Cairns' destination offering. It won World's Best Congress Centre in both 2004 and 2014. The next tranche of funding for the \$176 million expansion of the Cairns Convention Centre, announced in last year's budget, is also provided for in this budget. That is a wonderful outcome for Cairns. This will be a game-changing expansion, and we are all looking forward to that starting. This expansion will bring an additional 25 large conventions and events per year to Cairns and around 20,000 additional visitors per year to experience the wonders of Tropical North Queensland. The government's investment in the Cairns Convention Centre builds on aviation attraction funding and the \$120 million Cairns Shipping Development Project, which will bring a big economic boost through bigger cruise ships, more often.

When I announced in December last year that the government would pursue Cairns as the home of Queensland's first global tourism hub, GTH, it was probably one the most significant announcements in the Far North in many years. When you add the future global tourism hub to the three initiatives I have just mentioned, which in themselves are a catalyst for further private sector investment and confidence in our local economy, that is when the planets really begin to align for the Tropical North. There seems to have been some confusion by some who thought that there would be funding for the GTH in this budget. Those people have completely missed the point. This is about facilitating private sector investment from consortia that will feature some of the biggest names in entertainment and gaming on the planet.

Community consultation on the GTH is well underway and, as parochial Far North Queenslanders, we have an opportunity to show the world who we are, just how unique the place we live is, and to ensure that the final product delivers the best possible return for locals in years to come. A world-standard global tourism hub in Cairns is about much more than gaming and high-end entertainment, food and fashion; it is the mechanism to deliver world-class catalytic tourism infrastructure that will secure the economic future of our city and our region.

Since I was elected in 2009, roads on the southern approach to Cairns in my electorate have improved dramatically. This has continued, with this year's budget providing \$15.2 million for Cairns Southern Access Corridor Stage 3 to duplicate, from two to four lanes, the Bruce Highway from Edmonton to south of Wrights Creek. This project has a total cost of \$481 million and is being delivered in partnership with the Australian government. If we add up the Bruce Highway investment—including the four-laning from Edmonton to Gordonvale coming next year—by project's completion we will have seen more than \$680 million spent to support roads in the growing southern corridor of Cairns.

The 2018-19 budget delivers \$500,000 to refurbish M Block Library at Woree State High School. Across the electorate the budget provides over \$1.1 million in 2018-19 for maintenance and minor works across 12 schools in the Mulgrave electorate. The budget continues funding of the \$4.5 million construction of an indoor sports facility at Gordonvale State High School.

It was a pleasure to recently announce a grant of \$480,000 under the Female Facilities Program to construct a new amenities block, including unisex change rooms, toilet facilities and baby change facilities, to support touch football and Rugby League at Alley Park in Gordonvale, home of the mighty Southern Suburbs Cockatoos.

The 2018-19 budget continues to focus on improving life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders. I spoke earlier about the success of some of the job-creating programs implemented last term and continuing. It is wonderful to see. As at 4 May 2018, the Back to Work program had supported 1,341 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander jobseekers into employment and Skilling Queenslanders for Work had assisted 5,103 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders since 2015. This includes employment of 76 local trainees across 14 Indigenous councils—a real achievement. We will also be continuing the Youth Employment Program, launched in May 2015. It supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander year 12 graduates and other skilled candidates with career advice and resume and job interview support. As at 30 April 2018, 862 job placements were achieved through YEP, exceeding the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships' overall jobs target of 610 for 2017-18. Getting a good education is the foundation for securing good jobs in later life, and we know that early engagement with the education system leads to improved outcomes.

Members of this House will have heard how the Australian government has walked away from the longstanding funding agreement for remote Indigenous housing that had been in place for five decades. I was extremely pleased to see the efforts in this budget to ensure it delivers \$239 million to improve housing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders. The need for improved housing in discrete Indigenous communities is more than a roof over people's heads. Suitable housing will reduce the issue of overcrowding, which we know has detrimental impacts on social and educational outcomes for children.

Members will be aware that I am very proud to have the community of Yarrabah in my electorate of Mulgrave—the largest mainland Aboriginal community in Australia. I am very pleased to say that there are some great outcomes in this budget and over the forward estimates for Yarrabah, including: \$321,081 over two years to install solar panels throughout Yarrabah on housing and council facilities; \$473,886 to upgrade two sewerage pumps; improved community safety through funding of \$414,780 to install CCTV security cameras throughout Yarrabah; and \$390,610 to develop stage 1 of a waste transfer station. Collectively, that is over \$1.2 million to be spent in Yarrabah next year alone. I thank the Deputy Premier and Treasurer for those allocations. It is an excellent outcome for our community.

As the Speaker of the Queensland Legislative Assembly—the view is different from down here—I also wish to make a few specific remarks about the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill 2018. Members would be well aware that over the course of the last financial year the number of seats has increased from 89 to 93 and boundary changes have meant many MPs now represent quite different electorates after the redistribution. The budget provides the necessary funds to resource all 93 members through electorate accommodation.

Now more than ever, MPs need appropriate ICT resources to support the data communication and business system needs of members and electorate staff, working both within and without the electorate office environment. The appropriation for parliament provides funds to finalise a new ICT strategy and work program to achieve this.

The budget also provides funds for the series of events to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the first parliamentary sitting in Queensland Parliament House. I strongly urge all members to get involved with the PH150 celebrations, which will take place in August this year. I especially commend the public open day to take place here at Parliament House on Saturday, 11 August.

I am proud of the turnaround in the Queensland economy over the past few years and the improved fiscal position of the state. I see that this will continue over the coming years. I am proud to have played some part in handing down some budgets, improving Queensland's credit rating and overseeing the creation of jobs with all of the programs that have been in place since 2015. I look forward to seeing those economic improvements continue statewide but particularly in my region of Far North Queensland, which has the essential building blocks for growth and investment for the next decade. I commend the bills to the House.