




Speech By
Michael Healy

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

Record of Proceedings, 3 December 2020

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) (2020-2021) BILL

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 **Mr HEALY** (Cairns—ALP) (4.03 pm): I rise to make my contribution to the debate on the appropriation bills. From the outset it is important to acknowledge that the city of Cairns and our region were first impacted by COVID-19 when our traditional Chinese tourist numbers failed to materialise in February of this year. Since that time and until we see the return of our international visitors, Cairns remains heavily impacted as a result of COVID-19 in every sector of our community. That is why we need this budget to continue the ongoing investment in our community and to stimulate further private sector investment. I thank the Treasurer for ensuring that that is exactly what we have received.

Cairns is not just the tourism mecca that we all know and love. In addition, we have an extensive marine sector, a growing manufacturing industry and an ever-growing need for the essential services that our beautiful tropical city needs. This budget delivers in key areas.

First and foremost, we continue to invest in the education sector with Edge Hill State School receiving \$5.2 million to renew the administration building for school and student hubs. Cairns State High School, where an \$11 million hall is currently being built, will receive \$5.8 million to add to the completion of that construction and the refurbishment of a teaching block. Trinity Bay State High School will, over this fiscal period, receive \$1 million out of a \$13.5 million total spend over four years to refurbish its industrial technology and design facilities and to construct a new performing arts centre. I know that the principal of that school has been very keen to see that happen, as have the students. We see funds going to Parramatta and Balaclava state schools for essential shading materials. There is over \$250,000 for minor works for schools in the Cairns area. We know how important our children's education is and that is why we continue to invest in Queensland's future, our children.

We continue to fund the ever-important road infrastructure in and around our city. On the Cairns Ring Road, on the Cairns CBD to Smithfield section we will see the construction of additional lanes.

Mr Crawford interjected.

Mr HEALY: I acknowledge that that is the minister's and thank him. It is fantastic that there is \$2.9 million in this budget period out of a \$359 million total spend to increase capacity on the Captain Cook Highway between the Bruce Highway and the Kennedy Highway. The Cairns Western Arterial Road project will receive \$60 million to duplicate lanes between Redlynch and Kamerunga, which the minister and I also share. I use that road frequently, as do a lot of my constituents. The Smithfield Bypass will see \$42.4 million invested in this economic period out of a \$164 million total spend. A much needed upgrade to the intersection of Anderson and English streets in Cairns will receive \$124,000. For the many bike-riding residents of Brinsmead, \$43,000 has been allocated to design a shared pathway between Brinsmead and Freshwater. Those are just some of the major road projects that are happening in and around Cairns, contributing to our region's growth.

Many in the seat of Cairns have asked for economic diversity. To support our need for economic diversity, the Queensland government will invest \$30 million to upgrade the Cairns Marine Precinct and fund a business case for the future development of the precinct.

Mrs Frecklington: Oh!

Mr HEALY: Some people came up to Cairns and were going to give \$20 million to one company for one piece of equipment and said that that was going to grow the industry.

Mrs Frecklington: Touchy about that subject, are we?

Mr HEALY: I believe it is important to highlight the significant opportunity that this business case presents. The Palaszczuk Labor government has seen how it is going to help everybody, not just one little business. To rekindle a ship-building industry in Cairns would provide secure jobs, apprenticeships and further investment in our marine sector. I cannot register strongly enough the vast potential that this business case may bring. Who knows: if the federal member for Leichhardt, Warren Entsch, ever achieved any of the many promises he has made to the people of Cairns about grey boats, that could only be a good thing by increasing the demand for our marine precinct.

The upgrade includes two new wharves for the Port of Cairns. The funding will deliver 150 new jobs during construction, pay for an upgrade of services and expand Cairns' capacity to carry out in-water maintenance on vessels used not only by the Australian Defence Force and Border Force but also potentially our ever-growing superyacht sector. The Queensland government is working in partnership with Ports North to deliver that infrastructure upgrade. The precinct may require total capital infrastructure expenditure of up to \$150 million and future contributions will be sought from the Australian government.

The Deputy Speaker has reviewed and approved my budget speech for incorporation. As such, I ask that the remainder of my speech be incorporated in *Hansard*.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Krause): In accordance with standing and sessional orders, your speech will be incorporated.

The speech read as follows—

The Queensland Government is also investigating the potential reshoring of commercial vessel manufacture required for servicing the region, which has the potential to support local economic activity and create employment. This work will inform the business case and will also assess the feasibility of capitalising on the existing skilled workforce, contractor base and infrastructure within the Cairns Marine Precinct, which has a legacy of significant ship building over many years.

Speaker, transforming Cairns Hospital into a university hospital with research centre was a commitment we made to the people of Cairns and I'm happy to report that Queensland Health is investing \$67.9 million to kickstart the transformation of Cairns Hospital into a university hospital for the city, including \$15 million to acquire land for a research, education and innovation precinct, fully integrated with the hospital. Working in partnership with James Cook University, this investment will provide better health care for the Far North and attract the future generation of health professionals to Cairns.

The Cairns Hospital will get an expanded emergency department and a new endoscopy suite and operating theatre, helping to meet the health needs of a growing and ageing population. These upgrades will deliver world-class health facilities for the region and support a further 150 construction jobs to underpin our economic recovery. And our Cairns Ambulance station and Operations Centre expansion and refurbishment will continue with a further \$800,000 invested during this budget period to continue the over \$10 million dollar much needed upgrade.

As I indicated from the outset Speaker, our region's vitally important Tourism Industry has been ravaged by the impact of COVID-19 and as a result we have seen millions invested into our region by the Palaszczuk Government in the form of fee waivers and payroll tax deferrals, in addition to direct capital injections for large operators and those seeking assistance with new products.

At a State level we understand the challenges being faced by our Tourism industry and that is why this budget will invest \$74 million to fast-track tourism recovery and restore tourism jobs through our Rebuilding Queensland Tourism initiative. In assisting the industry we have established the \$20 million Queensland Tourism Activation Fund to partner with the tourism industry and councils to develop existing and new Queensland tourism experiences.

A \$20 million events boost to attract more events for Queensland. This investment will include \$14 million for major events and \$1.5 million a year for business events, and we know how important Events are to our regional economies. In addition, \$15 million dollars will be provided to Tourism and Events Queensland for a marketing blitz to encourage travellers to experience Queensland and a \$15 million Regional Tourism Organisation Fund to provide a special one-off funding injection to regional tourism organisations and \$4 million to deliver business capability training and contributing to future-proofing the industry.

After providing a rent free period for almost all of 2020, Ports North will seek an independent review in rate discussions as promised by this Government to our Marine Tourism tenants at the Cairns Marina.

Small businesses are the backbone of the Cairns economy and the Queensland economy. This Budget continues to support small businesses which represent more than 97 per cent of all businesses in the state and employ around 42 per cent of all private sector workers.

Small businesses across the state have been among the hardest hit by the economic impacts of COVID-19. In response to the pandemic the Palaszczuk Government implemented a number of programs and initiatives to support small businesses, their employees and the communities they serve. These programs included:

\$1 billion in concessional jobs support loans, interest free for 12 months, to support businesses to keep Queenslanders in work. More than 6,900 Queensland businesses have drawn down loans from the scheme supporting over 86,000 local jobs. Almost 90 per cent of businesses accessing loans were small, having 20 employees or fewer

Substantial State Government tax relief across the 2019-20 and 2020-21 years through payroll tax refunds, payment waivers and deferrals; up to \$196 million in Small Business Adaption Grants of up to \$10,000

\$100 million in electricity bill relief for small businesses; along with \$54.5 million to support the transport industry as well as support for Far North Queensland ports and related businesses.

I note with great enthusiasm that the Treasurer has announced the Backing Queensland Business Investment Fund which will have a war chest of \$500,000 million to target investments in businesses that are based in Queensland and will create Queensland-based jobs. This fund will provide excellent opportunities for a number of small businesses who fulfil the criteria. The fund will be managed between Queensland Treasury and QIC.

Speaker in the regional Development area we are investing a \$100,000 in the Advanced Fibre Composites Maintenance and Repair Facility in this budget period for the Cairns Aviation Skills Centre to develop a business case for an advanced fibre composites maintenance and repair facility at Cairns Airport. We see a very bright future in this sector and this investment continues our broader investment in our regions aviation industry.

From an environment perspective Speaker the Great Barrier Reef will benefit from an additional \$40 million worth of support. This includes \$10 million for a Reef Assist Program and \$6 million over four years for the GBR Island Arks project to deliver ecotourism in the region.

An additional \$200 million will be provided to the Works for Queensland program to support local governments outside South East Queensland. Growing our regions and supporting key industries such as tourism, agriculture and mining is essential and will remain ongoing.

Providing more Queenslanders with access to the skills and training they need for rewarding careers. \$100 million has been provided over three years to upgrade TAFE campuses.

Providing concessions and easing the cost of living with an estimated \$6.3 billion in budget period, we will continue to provide Queenslanders with concessions targeted discounts, fee waivers, rebates, and subsidies.

And as promised to the people of Cairns we will have more police, doctors, nurses, teachers, teacher aides and allied health staff.

Speaker I'd like to finish by congratulating the Treasurer on delivering an economically responsible budget, as we on this side of the chamber are well aware, in these unprecedented times, what is needed is a measured and calculated response ensuring investment in essential services and job creating enterprises, whilst stimulating private sector investment, unlike those on the other side of the chamber who were proposing reckless economic populism.

Speaker, I will continue to work closely with all sectors of my community to advocate for them and our communities interests while ensuring our voice is heard as we continue to face the challenging days ahead.