




Speech By
Michael Healy

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

Record of Proceedings, 17 June 2021

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

 **Mr HEALY** (Cairns—ALP) (10.24 pm): Before I begin I want to acknowledge the overwhelming detail in some of the contributions that have been made. It is almost intimidating. I rise to make my meagre contribution to the budget in reply. Before I do, I would like to acknowledge and congratulate the Treasurer and his team for their hard work. Never before have any of us in this chamber ever seen the challenges that have evolved or presented themselves over the last 18 months. Hopefully we have seen the back of them, but it may well continue into the forwards because we are not out of the woods yet.

I think that presenting two budgets to people who can read a profit and loss statement and others who cannot is obviously a challenge, even for those who have the most basic education. However, the Premier and Treasurer of this government have been as one, as we as a government have been as one. We have been consistent with the simple message—

Honourable members interjected.

Mr HEALY: It is not over yet, so hang in there. The Premier, the Treasurer and this government have been as one and consistent with the simple message that a healthy community leads to a healthy economy, and today the figures speak for themselves. That sensible, calculated and measured response based on the science has worked and worked well, not just for the government but, far more importantly, for the people of Queensland. Investing in job-creating industries and activities is how you grow the economy. Investing in much needed social and community housing is how you grow the economy. Investing in our hospitals and associated staff is also how you grow the economy. Investing in our schools and teachers is how you contribute to building a better Queensland for the future, and that is what this budget does. We are not cutting services. We are not sacking people. We are not selling assets. This is a solid investment in our future. We are growing our economy and, most importantly, we are investing in the people of Queensland.

I will only make slight mention of those on the opposite side of the chamber, but we did hear the member for Sandgate highlight the member for Broadwater's inaccurate details. The creative accountancy we are hearing is impressively disappointing. You do not look at a P&L sheet and go 'maybe'. They are black and white. They are figures. You look down the columns. It is as basic as the day is long. What passes as the opposition in this state can best be described as a quagmire of dysfunction, displaying an impressive and consistent inability to comprehend or articulate any significant solutions to the challenges COVID-19 has presented. There is no greater example than those opposite calling on 64 occasions for the borders to be opened. What an absolutely impressively disappointing response. Not only did that reflect their inability to comprehend the magnitude of the challenge but it is as concerning that they did not even understand the science. It highlighted their total lack of understanding that to have a healthy economy you need a healthy community. The good news is that the people of Queensland knew that and reflected that towards the end of last year.

Only the other day I was speaking with a senior executive of a worldwide hotel chain, who told me that prior to COVID-19 the Pacific region was producing less than 20 per cent of that company's total profit. Now, due to the impact of COVID around the world the Pacific region now accounts for 54 per cent of this company's viable profit. A healthy society means a healthy economy. The facts speak for themselves.

Speaking of health, may I just touch on some of the spectacular things that are happening in our part of the world in Far North Queensland. When I look at the Far North I am pleased to report that the Palaszczuk government has continued its investment in our city and region with \$1.3 billion allocated. The Queensland government is investing \$133.9 million into projects at the Cairns hospital as part of its transition to a university hospital, supporting 389 full-time jobs. This government investment includes \$70 million for a new mental health facility, \$30 million for expanding our emergency department and fit-out for a pre-admission clinic, amongst other investments.

In addition, the government is investing \$24.9 million for critical infrastructure upgrades to ensure the ongoing efficient operation of the hospital to meet the projected future demand of its facilities. Completed projects include \$4.5 million to deliver a new hybrid theatre and \$4.5 million for the fit-out of an 11-bed ward. In addition, the Queensland government is investing an initial \$16.5 million for a Cairns Health Innovation Centre adjacent to the hospital site which is set to become a new public health precinct for clinical research, education, training, Indigenous health and community engagement. The government is developing the CHIC in partnership with the James Cook University and its Cairns Tropical Enterprise Centre.

As the Treasurer highlighted, since our government was first elected in 2015 we have overseen a 30 per cent increase in the strength of our nursing workforce. That means an additional 8,400 nurses and midwives. Queensland has 2,841 more doctors, 4,291 more health practitioners and 858 more ambulance personnel reinforcing our frontline health response.

You do not need to be a parent like me to understand the importance of education. The understanding of that importance is reflected in the government's commitment to the Far North, with \$51.2 million being spent in our schools to maintain, improve and upgrade our schools in the region. This includes half a million dollars to refurbish the resource centre at Balaclava State School. I was very happy to ring the principal there the other day and have a chat with her about that. Thank you again, Minister.

In addition to that investment, there is \$600,000 to upgrade the Cairns West State School, over \$5 million for administration upgrades to Edge Hill State School and over a quarter of a million dollars each for both Balaclava State School and Parramatta State School for out-of-school-hours care. This is absolutely fundamental. In addition, the new hall facility at Trinity Bay State High School will receive \$450,000 for initial works out of the planned \$11.5 million.

I am also very pleased to report that the Cairns Diversionsary Centre will receive \$3.2 million to expand its facilities. Those funds have been allocated, in addition to \$1.2 million to establish a Cairns Managing Public Intoxication Program. This is an essential piece of local infrastructure which contributes to dealing with our city's itinerant challenges.

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

The speech read as follows—

Speaker The Palaszczuk Government has always acknowledged the importance of small businesses and their need for skilled staff. In doing so, we believe that one of the best things a government can do is to provide people with the skills, and the training and the confidence to get a job. One of the most important initiatives in this space is the "Skilling Queenslanders for Work" program, along with the "Back to Work" Program. These initiatives have been essential to a number of local businesses and in reducing unemployment numbers in and around Cairns, and I'm pleased to confirm that these outstanding initiatives will continue with strong funding being provided over the next 4 years.

The government provided significant tax relief to support Queensland businesses, landlords, tenants, pubs and clubs, including: payroll tax refunds, waivers and deferrals for eligible businesses, targeted at small to medium businesses a payroll tax exemption for wages subsidised by the Job Keeper payment land tax rebates, waivers and deferrals for eligible taxpayers. An estimated 340 employers in Far North Queensland will also benefit in 2021-22 from the higher payroll tax threshold.

Tourism initiatives which Far North Queensland will benefit from: \$24.7 million (\$15 million in 2021-22) to continue delivering the Growing Tourism Infrastructure Fund 2020, to fast-track the development of new and enhanced tourism infrastructure projects state-wide. \$7.5 million towards the Work in Paradise program to attract workers from across Australia to help rebuild our regional tourism sector. \$1.1 million in 2021-22 for the delivery of projects under the Year of Indigenous Tourism that support the growth of Indigenous business and partnerships and increasing Indigenous participation in tourism, generating jobs and improved economic outcomes.

Ongoing investment in the "Building our Regions" will bring a smile to Mayors and councillors across the region as we see a \$60 million allocation to 66 critical infrastructure projects in Far North Queensland, supporting economic development and 416 jobs.

From a law and order perspective, apart from our ongoing commitment to grow our Police numbers, which remains on target, in Cairns we receive \$2.2 million to progress the New Police Facility at Cairns West. In addition to this the ongoing investment, a further funding of \$150,000 has been allocated for the delivery of the Space and Place Activities for Youth in Cairns initiative. This initiative addresses youth disengagement in high density public housing areas in Cairns. But it doesn't end there, with \$7.4 million allocated in 2021-22 out of a \$17.4 million total spend to progress the upgrade of the police facility at Cairns. This is a much-needed refurbishment of the principle police headquarters in the far north and will maximise the efficiency and reliability of police services, bringing the facility up to date with the latest technology and infrastructure. While we are at it, \$6 million in 2021-22 out of a \$11.4 million total spend will progress the replacement police facility at Woree. Clearly the government's commitment to the safety and security of Queenslanders is undeniable with major investment taking place in multiple locations across Cairns, and this backs up our clear agenda from the last state election with the capacity to properly resource the increased policing presence.

Additionally, there is a strong commitment from this government to water security. We understand that access to safe and clean drinking water is a fundamental right for every Queenslander. Not only is this essential to the liveability and health of our cities but it is vital in future proofing our great state and supporting economic development. This money will give life to important water supply and reticulation projects as well as sewerage and wastewater infrastructure. Many Councils around Queensland are under pressure to deliver such projects and services and I'm pleased to say we acknowledge their issues and are responding appropriately. At a time when COVID-19 detection and control is critical, further welcome investment in wastewater networks is pivotal to ensure discovery and elimination of the virus in Queensland continues.

Plainly, this budget has not forgotten Councils and their needs, because the state government intrinsically understands that relationship between community and local government, and in doing so can effectively channel support to every layer and demographic within our society.

Once again, we see an example of a government that is listening and responding with an unprecedented contribution in the area of housing and homelessness. The COVID pandemic has seen a new wave of interstate immigration to Queensland, the healthy state. Like never before people are moving here, and cities such as Cairns are bearing the brunt of accommodation issues and housing affordability. As a former Chair of Access Community housing in Cairns I know only too well the importance of the basic human rights of food and shelter, as well the detrimental effect it can have on all our community when such essentials of life are not available to all. As such I am very proud to see that this state government has responded appropriately and swiftly. So, in this year's budget, we're fast tracking housing delivery to increase supply across the state. Our bold new housing plan is the largest concentrated investment in social housing in Queensland's history. \$1.9 billion will be invested through the Palaszczuk Government's Housing Strategy Action Plan to increase housing stock, including 7,400 new homes over the next four years as part of the Queensland Housing Investment Growth Initiative, of which \$203.3M has been allocated for the Far North. And as I said, this is a holistic approach not just a single sugar hit. This sustainable plan will provide a foundation for the affordable housing of all Queenslanders whether they be renters or buyers. And significantly, underpinning the housing strategy plan is the value and premise that a house is principally a home and place to live, not a commodity to buy, stockpile and exploit at the expense of the most vulnerable in our society. That is why this is a concerted and multifaceted approach that will also entail a new \$1 billion Housing Investment Fund. As well as \$20 million to expand domestic and family violence support services and another \$20 million for homelessness initiatives.

We should remember that the aforementioned initiatives are but just a few projects of a larger infrastructure plan that sees 1.2 billion invested into the far northern regional economy and supports some 3900 jobs in productivity-enhancing infrastructure and capital works. It shouldn't be forgotten that 61.2% of the total budget spend is occurring outside of greater Brisbane.

Transport infrastructure is key to the accessibility and economy of the north and I'm pleased to see significant investment continue in the road network. The road to Weipa will be sealed and this will open up Cape York's economy to new tourism and economic opportunities that were previously out of reach while supporting local jobs and training. Further, roads around Cairns are being transformed thanks to projects like the \$164 million Smithfield Bypass and the \$481 million duplication of one of the busiest stretches of the Bruce Highway in the state between Edmonton and Gordonvale. We'll start upgrading the Captain Cook Highway north of the Cairns CBD later this year and moving ahead with planning to fully duplicate the last remaining single lane sections of the Cairns Western Arterial Road. This government won't stop improving connectivity for the regions, whether it by air, sea, rail or road links and transport diversity will remain a priority and a vital artery of our regional economies.

And in the face of ever-present natural disasters and weather events this government has pledged support for disaster resilience initiatives: \$14.4 million has been allocated in 2021—22 to the Queensland Resilience and Risk Reduction Fund, as part of the National Partnership Agreement, jointly funded with the Australian Government, to improve safety and natural disaster resilience across the state. The state government will continue to deliver a suite of targeted measures aimed at promoting disaster recovery and resilience from the \$100 million 2019 Betterment Fund established following the 2019 monsoon flooding event under the joint State-Commonwealth Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements. \$20 million has been allocated in this Budget to establish the 2021 Queensland Betterment Fund to improve disaster resilience and reduce the cost of future reconstruction of public assets damaged by natural disasters, jointly funded with the Australian Government.

Significant measures funded under these programs will also have the potential to reduce insurance premiums for Queensland households.