




Speech By
Bree James

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

Record of Proceedings, 26 June 2025

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

 **Ms JAMES** (Barron River—LNP) (5.07 pm): I rise today to share my take on this year's budget and what this means for the residents of Barron River and Far North Queensland. For too long the 'F' in Far North Queensland has stood for 'forgotten'. We have long been overlooked when it comes to meaningful investment in the state. We felt it in our roads, in our health services, in our housing and in the support our communities and industries need to thrive. The list of projects neglected in my region is long: long overdue upgrades to roads and bridges; a hospital which needs investment, a safe helipad and more parking; sports clubs that do not even have a clubhouse, adequate change rooms for females or proper lighting for night games and training. We also lacked investment in the environment, housing and in mental health services. There is a lot of work to do in Far North Queensland.

One of the key reasons I put my hand up to run for parliament was I could see that Far North Queensland was not getting its fair share and I knew that that had to change. That is why I am pleased to see this year's state budget take a real step in the right direction. This budget is a responsible budget and a first step in rectifying the fiscal vandalism of the former Labor government. I am pleased to see that all of my key election commitments have been honoured and there are a lot of extras in the budget that I was not expecting.

Let me start with one of the most significant commitments in the budget for my electorate and that is the funding of a brand new Barron River bridge. This is something that I have been rallying for for 500-plus days. If you ask Minister Mickelberg over there, I have been his little haemorrhoid.

Mr Mickelberg: I think I said pain in the neck.

Ms JAMES: Pain in the dot, whatever. I want to thank you for listening to my community during my campaign. The minister travelled to Cairns on several occasions to view the Barron River bridge. He and the Premier fought hard for 50-50 funding with the federal government to save the state from 80-20 funding.

I sincerely thank the cabinet and especially the minister for putting our Far North Queensland region at the forefront in this state's budget. To everyone in our community who reached out, who shared their concerns and who called for action for over a decade, I thank you. I know this investment is not going to ease your pain for a few years yet while the bridge goes through the lengthy planning and building phase, but it is another step forward. The second thing people ask about is the range. I am pleased to also see more funding in the budget to improve the Kuranda Range. We still have another 18 months of repair work to get the range back to what it was before the Jasper floods. I am pleased there is another \$262.5 million funding in the budget that will be used to begin to improve the range and make the road more resilient.

Other key infrastructure projects in the Far North will come to light through this year's budget, including upgrades to the Cairns Western Arterial Road. It is one of our busiest roads, it is vital during flood events and it is used daily during the morning and evening commute. The Bruce Highway is also

set for a much needed upgrade, which was made even more evident in January this year when our region was cut off from the rest of Australia, becoming an island for weeks. This commitment to safer regional roads means better access for our trucks, our tourists and our locals.

I am also pleased our government has a huge focus on getting more people into owning their own homes with the extension of the \$30,000 first home owner grant, abolishing stamp duty and allowing first home owners to rent out a room to help pay off their mortgage. The new nation-leading Boost to Buy deposit scheme will be a game changer. I know more people will be able to get out of the rent rat-race and into their own home. Far North Queensland will also have the biggest investment in the state for homelessness services, and social and affordable housing.

We have had a huge win for health with the axing of the patient tax and the Hospital Rescue Plan, which will deliver 104 beds to Cairns Base Hospital, as well as expanding services including orthopaedics, ophthalmology and plastic and reconstructive surgery. Of course, there is funding to secure a new and safe location for the Cairns Base Hospital helipad and a new car park. The \$67 million investment includes \$19 million to deliver long-overdue dedicated adolescent and young adult mental health acute beds in Cairns. There is also \$60 million for stage 1 of the Cairns Health and Innovation Centre. Our hardworking paramedics have had a huge win, with \$29 million committed towards the redevelopment of the Cairns ambulance operations centre, a project that is long overdue and was not a priority of the former government.

I am thrilled with the allocation of \$15.5 million in this budget to support the expansion of the Smithfield Mountain Bike Park trails, which is a project of regional and international significance. I fought hard for this commitment for 18 months and I thank the LNP government for recognising its importance not only to my electorate but also to the wider Far North Queensland region. I took the now Premier there in my first weeks as a candidate. I also took Minister O'Connor there. I do not think he will ever forgive me for taking him on his first-ever mountain bike ride. I also thank Minister Powell, who in his first weeks as the new Minister for Tourism committed to fast-tracking that project.

Once completed, the project will inject \$95 million per annum into the Cairns economy through increased visitor spending. This funding commitment is the result of over a decade of passionate advocacy from the Cairns mountain biking community, the Cairns Mountain Bike Club, TTNQ and so many dedicated young riders and families who have championed this vision and were ignored by the former government. Their tireless work has helped put Cairns on the map as a world-class mountain biking destination. I am thrilled to see their efforts recognised with real funding that will support jobs, tourism and healthy active lifestyles for generations to come. We will be the reef, rainforest and riding capital of the globe.

The environment has also had a big win, with the biggest investment in NRM regions for on-ground activity that will deliver significant outcomes for threatened species, waterways and coasts, sustainable agriculture, disaster recovery and resilience, biosecurity and engaging First Nations people. We have committed to 150 more land and sea rangers and \$24 million to the Great Barrier Reef Urban Technology and Innovation Fund to tackle wastewater, stormwater and industrial runoff to the Great Barrier Reef. We are investing \$600,000 to build a new turtle rehabilitation centre on Green Island. We have set ourselves the ambitious target of increasing our protected areas by more in one term than those opposite did in a decade.

The budget commits \$2 million to upgrade some of our most valued community spaces across the Cairns northern beaches and hinterland. This is funding that I fought hard for after the Jasper floods. It will support much needed improvements to community halls that are not only used and loved by locals but also provided a lifeline during the devastating Jasper floods. Community halls at places such as Machans Beach, Holloways Beach, Yorkey's Knob and Koah and the Kuranda Neighbourhood Centre were vital in supporting locals during and for many long months after the floods. I want to thank all of the locals who volunteer in those halls and who fundraise constantly to upgrade them. I know that this investment in their community spaces will be put to great use.

The crucial investment of \$888,000 in the North Queensland Natural Disaster Mitigation Program could not come at a more important time for Far North Queensland. After the devastating floods we faced in 2023 and again in 2025, our communities know all too well the harsh reality of disaster. This funding will help local councils strengthen flood defences, reduce future risks and protect families, homes and businesses from the trauma and financial strain that disasters bring.

The budget delivers \$9 million to support veterans and their families through legal, employment, homelessness and education initiatives. I commend the Premier for this budget allocation and his commitment to developing Queensland's very first veterans strategy. I am passionately advocating for a new Legacy house in Far North Queensland—a dedicated space where veterans can access the

support they deserve. Legacy have been advocating to all levels of government for years now but it has fallen on deaf ears. Premier, with this funding you have allocated, I am sure you know that I am going to be pestering you hard for a share of that \$9 million for a FNQ Legacy house, so look out.

I am also pleased to announce that many of our local Barron River schools will be receiving significant upgrades: a new nature-based playground at Redlynch State College, a nature-based playground at Caravonica State School, a shade structure for Trinity Beach State School and a new multipurpose hall for Freshwater State School. There is an additional \$900,000 for general maintenance across schools in the electorate. These upgrades will improve learning environments, support outdoor play and ensure our schools continue to meet the needs of a growing region.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you have reviewed and approved my speech for incorporation. As such, I ask that the remainder of my speech be incorporated in the *Record of Proceedings*.

The speech read as follows—

As someone who owned and operated a small business for over 25 years, I understand firsthand the challenges and opportunities faced by local entrepreneurs. That's why I'm proud this budget includes \$44.7 million in additional funding over five years to boost business productivity and innovation across Queensland.

This investment will support initiatives like the Business Concierge service, new grant programs, and the establishment of regional innovation and start-up hubs all designed to help local businesses grow, adapt, and thrive in an ever-changing economy.

Our region is one of the hardest hit in terms of youth crime. A Cairns Youth Justice School in our region will support youth that need a specialised school to help them get their lives back on track, I welcome this funding commitment.

As the Assistant Minister for Early Education, I'm proud to see the rollout of free health checks for kindy kids across Queensland. This important initiative will give children the best start to their learning journey, ensuring early identification of health and development needs before they start school.

Families will also get cost of living benefits from the \$1.886 billion Back to School initiative over four years, providing \$100 per student to help cover the cost of school essentials available for every child attending a government or non-government primary school. I am also grateful to see \$1.4 million in the budget to support the incredible work School Savvy do in our community, to support families doing it tough at back-to-school time with stationery, uniforms, and even free kid's haircuts.

To improve the quality of education, we're delivering \$221.1 million over four years, and \$48.4 million ongoing each year, through the More Teachers, Better Education plan—helping get more teachers into classrooms and lifting education outcomes right across Queensland.

I also want to commend the Treasurer and the Minister for Sport for their commitment to grassroots sport through the expansion of the PlayOn! vouchers program—a fantastic initiative supporting Queensland's young sporting stars. The \$200 vouchers will help ensure more children can get involved in sport, no matter their family's financial circumstances. Importantly, a dedicated portion of funding has been set aside specifically for regional and rural communities and for children with a disability. This new program now covers winter and summer sports, helping level the playing field across the state.

As the Assistant Minister for FNQ, I want to also acknowledge the funding investments outside of my electorate, spanning across Cairns and the Far North region. This includes a \$2.7 million investment in the construction of Queensland's first Chinese Culture and Heritage Centre, right here in Cairns.

This year's budget also delivers \$200,000 for much-needed upgrades to the Cairns footpath network, including the construction of new footpaths in key locations across the Barron River electorate and the Northern Beaches.

Another significant investment in this budget is the Wangetti Trail a project that has been a failure under Labor's watch. Our government will not only finish this project, but we will plan properly, ensuring the trail has the vital infrastructure to support tourists and locals, such as a parking lot which wasn't considered and now we have people walking the highway. We will turn the Wangetti Trail from an epic fail to an epic trail.

This budget takes real steps to address the housing and homelessness crisis backing in the people on the frontlines and delivering help where it's most urgently needed. We're investing \$380.1 million over five years to strengthen crisis accommodation initiatives and boost frontline housing and homelessness services across the state ensuring more Queenslanders have a safe place to turn in times of need.

An additional \$208.1 million over four years will extend the 20 per cent funding uplift for specialist homelessness services, supporting the incredible work being done by dedicated staff and volunteers in shelters, outreach programs, and emergency support centres.

Critically, the government is also investing \$31.1 million over four years to double the capacity of both Womensline and Mensline making sure more victims of domestic and family violence can get help when they need it most. This includes delivering a brand new North Queensland-based hub, giving our region better access to vital support services and strengthening the response to domestic and family violence right here in our own backyard.

This budget continues to invest in the long-term resilience and growth of our region. We're delivering \$166 million this year as part of the \$390 million Cairns Water Security Stage One Project, in partnership with the Australian Government—a critical investment in securing the region's future water supply.

I recently visited the Kuranda Weir and the Barron Gorge Power Station, witnessing firsthand the vital work being done to maintain and upgrade these essential assets. Their role in providing reliable water and power to our community cannot be overstated and this budget includes \$16.2 million to support improvements to these critical infrastructure sites.

Community safety and emergency response services are being strengthened with \$5.3 million to replace the Cairns Fire Communications Centre and \$29 million for the redevelopment of the Cairns Ambulance Operations Centre.

The region's marine and training industries are also receiving a major boost, with the budget held for the Cairns Common User Facility and \$13.6 million to complete the expansion of the Great Barrier Reef International Marine College, delivering new classrooms, training simulators and upgraded staff and student facilities.

This Budget marks a turning point for Barron River and the broader Far North region. After years of being overlooked, we are now seeing real investment, real action and real outcomes that will shape a stronger, safer and more connected future for our region.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Marr): Member for Barron River, you did use unparliamentary language when you mentioned the minister. I know it was not to offend, but I ask you to withdraw.

Ms JAMES: I withdraw.