




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

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

 **Mr HEALY** (Cairns—ALP) (11.49 am): The 2025-26 Queensland state budget—the first under the Crisafulli LNP government—will be long remembered for its total lack of transparency and insufficient investment in critical infrastructure projects, particularly in Far North Queensland. Despite promises of fiscal responsibility and regional development, the budget falls short of delivering tangible support for key initiatives, particularly in Cairns, raising concerns about the government's commitment to the region's growth and, most importantly, our prosperity.

I find it more concerning than interesting that a government which lives on slogans—like a 'fresh start'—is keen to see their budget called 'boring'. One would have thought it would be something they would be proud of—so much for the new start. The bulk of this is Labor initiatives rebranded: FairPlay to Play On!—absolutely remarkable!—and the home owner equity scheme. I am confident that as new members spend more time in here they will realise that their accolades are supporting previous Labor legislation. I can see why they did not call this an 'honest start'.

Here is an example the government may wish to explain to the people of Queensland. Traditionally, governments of both colours have released a breakdown of projects with their funding allocations and delivery timeframes through their annual Queensland transport infrastructure program, but apparently that is not happening anymore. The LNP government has stripped out all funding allocations from the budget papers which have progressed to contract stage. This government wants to hide project costs and muddy the waters—so much for a fresh start.

The Queensland government has squandered a critical opportunity to secure Far North Queensland's place at the forefront of Australia's defence and naval future by failing to adequately fund the Cairns Marine Precinct Common User Facility. At a time when shipbuilding uncertainty looms large in Western Australia, Cairns stands out as a strategic, well-positioned alternative—offering existing infrastructure, a highly skilled maritime workforce and direct proximity to key Pacific operations. Rather than seizing this moment, the state's underinvestment sends a signal that it is either unaware or unwilling to act on the region's immense potential. With only 10 per cent of the required funding committed, Cairns is now at risk of being bypassed and losing out on tens of millions in future marine sustainment and maintenance work—work which would have created high-value jobs and strengthened Australia's sovereign capability.

This is not just a missed funding target; it is a failure of vision and a clear example that the Far North is not a priority. With infrastructure cost blowouts in other parts of Queensland still attracting funding and still going ahead, it is clear that Cairns and the Far North are not a priority. The cost will be counted in lost opportunities for decades to come if an appropriate solution is not arrived at soon.

The budget's approach to transport infrastructure in Far North Queensland has rightly drawn criticism for its vagueness, its lack of funding clarity and the absence of meaningful timelines. Nowhere is this more evident than with the Cairns Western Arterial Road duplication—a much needed congestion-busting upgrade. While the project is referenced in broad terms, we can find no concrete

budget allocations or delivery schedules, leaving residents and local industries in the dark. This total lack of detail breeds uncertainty and signals a troubling reluctance by the state government to commit to the infrastructure the region needs. In stark contrast, the federal government has already stepped up, contributing \$210 million to the project as part of its broader commitment to Northern Australia infrastructure. This makes the state's failure to meet its share even more glaring, if that is the case.

The result is not just stalled progress but growing frustration within the community, as poor planning and a lack of transparency delay critical improvements to regional mobility and economic growth. As I understand it, the same lack of detail applies to the Bruce Highway southern access into Cairns and the Kuranda Range Road improvements. We cannot find allocated funding or any timelines.

The people of Far North Queensland deserve more than vague references and political lip-service. They deserve a government that delivers. Instead, they have been handed yet another round of smoke and mirrors from a state government unwilling to invest where it needs to. I acknowledge the contribution by the federal government. The Queensland Labor Party committed to the Barron River bridge prior to the election, and we know that the federal government did that. Finally, the LNP have committed their funding, and it is about time. The big question is: when will it start?

Despite the government's rhetorical commitment to statewide health care, the budget falls short in delivering tangible growth for the Far North, most notably the Cairns Hospital. Speaking to executives at the hospital, I am told there is limited new funding earmarked for the hospital, despite its critical role as the region's major public health facility servicing a rapidly growing and aging Cairns as well as across the cape, the Torres Strait, inland communities and even, on occasions, residents from Papua New Guinea. The absence of any clear allocations for hospital upgrades, bed expansions or specialist services suggests a worrying disconnect between the government's promises and its priorities when it comes to health infrastructure.

What makes this even more concerning is the broader context: since coming to power the LNP state government has halted several major hospital infrastructure projects across Queensland, including surgical upgrades and expansions previously slated for delivery. Cairns is now caught in the middle, with four new surgical theatres and 30-plus new beds being put on hold, according to the member for Mulgrave, while the region's health needs continue to grow. Staff shortages, high-patient demand and limited surgical capacity are already placing significant pressure on the system. Without urgent state investment, outcomes will worsen, waiting times will grow and confidence in public health care will continue to erode. The people of Far North Queensland deserve better—not delays or a pause, deferrals or vague commitments which may never materialise.

The tourism sector—a cornerstone of the Queensland and Far North economy—has been left in a state of uncertainty following the release of the new Queensland state budget. This is quite interesting. While the budget papers include a broad commitment of \$446 million towards Destination 2045—which, by the way, is actually a government document, not an industry document—there is a conspicuous lack of detail on how these funds will be distributed across Queensland's diverse regions, including Cairns and the Tropical North. For a sector still recovering from the impacts of COVID, this lack of transparency is more than oversight; it is a serious setback.

Tourism operators, regional councils and industry leaders across the state have consistently called for targeted investment to support aviation access, workforce development, infrastructure and product innovation, yet the government's budget offers little clarity on whether any of these local priorities will be addressed. Advance Cairns and other economic development advocates have already voiced concerns, noting that a single vague line in the budget papers does not inspire confidence nor does it support informed business planning or investment attraction. In contrast to its glossy promotional material, the government's approach to tourism funding amounts to little more than window-dressing. With no regional breakdowns, no project-level commitments and no clear timelines, the Destination 2045 strategy risks becoming another unfunded promise, long on vision and short on delivery.

Adding to a sense of unease, the budget does little to address the soaring costs facing tourism operators in Queensland. Rising insurance premiums, staffing shortages and high travel costs continue to plague the industry, yet there are no dedicated relief or resilience packages to assist tourism businesses navigating these challenges.

The aviation attraction scheme, vitally important to the tourism industry, remains vague in any detail. I notice the tourism minister turns up at events and waves his hands, but the industry knows this is a Labor initiative. It has nothing to do with you blokes, but you are still turning up. The industry find it more than entertaining. Who will see new domestic and international routes? What will the criteria be for such decisions? Exactly how much money will be invested into this initiative and, more importantly, for how long?

Even the funding for marquee projects like the Wangetti Trail remains surrounded by ambiguity. While the budget claims to continue to invest in the remaining 87 kilometres of the trail—and I want to acknowledge that is a good thing; we cannot wait to see how much better you make it—there is little clarity on how much funding will be spent in the short term. A fresh start? This is another Labor initiative!

On behalf of the industry, may I also express concern with the little detail on business events and absolutely no detail whatsoever on events—period. In a state where tourism supports hundreds of thousands of jobs, billions in investments and underpins entire communities, the lack of clarity and commitment is not just disappointing, it is hugely concerning to the tourism industry. If this government expects to work with the tourism industry, you have to be honest and tell them what they do. When the Destination 2045 document came out, the industry was told, ‘No, no, there is no detail. Wait for the budget.’ Now the budget has come out, there is no detail. No wonder this industry is suspicious. Queenslanders deserve a clear, detailed tourism plan, backed by real investment, not vague figures buried in footnotes and speeches. The budget was a chance to restore confidence and show leadership. Instead, it delivered confusion, half measures and missed opportunities. It reflects absolutely no leadership whatsoever.

With the limited time I have left, I also want to raise some concerns in relation to my other shadow portfolio area of jobs and training. The concerns are about the lack of detail I have already raised in other areas of this portfolio. I have found no details on the future of the highly successful Back to Work initiative, which worked extremely well, particularly in Far North Queensland, and I have seen only one small reference to Free TAFE in the SDS which is concerning. As the facts and figures emerge, I will have more to say in that space.

I commend the opposition leader on his statements yesterday to advocate for the Activate Australia’s Skills campaign to be adopted nationally, which would aim to boost the recognition of national and international skills and accreditations. Basically, we are getting more people onto the tools.

I want to acknowledge and applaud the LNP for continuing the housing investment in Cairns, which was a Labor strategy. I could not see any money for the Whitfield State School, but we will have a look at that. They have been promised a performing arts centre, so I will follow that up. CADCAI have also been made some promises—we have not found anything there. I know that if I did not mention Whitfield State School, Mr Thompson and the kids would be very upset.

Finally, I want to touch on the fact that after nine years in office, I and many in this chamber and many across this state still do not know what this Premier stands for or what his vision is. I can excuse the new members and their contributions—because you are still drinking the Kool Aid and you are following the speaking points—but when you spend more time in here, you will understand how things work. This Premier and cabinet are obsessed—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr McDonald): Member for Cairns, direct your comments through the chair, please.

Mr HEALY: This Premier and cabinet are obsessed with Labor and that is all they can talk about. The Premier and his ministers are referencing Labor all the time. At any question time, that is the dominant feature. You are not talking about what your vision is. You are not talking about what use—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Direct your comments through the chair, member for Cairns.

Mr HEALY: They are not talking about what they are pushing. If government is too hard, I suggest you pop down the road and visit the Governor and let her know because your whingeing reflects your inability to deal with the policy challenges and your personal attacks reflect your immaturity.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Cairns, you are an experienced member of this House. The standing orders are that you will address matters through the chair. ‘You’ and ‘your’ has a different connotation.

Mr HEALY: Thank you very much. The 2025-26 budget’s shortcomings in addressing the critical needs of Far North Queensland reflect a broader issue of unfulfilled promises and a total lack of transparency. To truly support the region’s growth and prosperity, the government must move beyond vague commitments and provide concrete, adequately funded plans for infrastructure, health care and economic development. Only through genuine investment and transparent governance can the potential of Cairns and the broader region be fully realised.