



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Federation Chamber**

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

**Bruce Highway**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 17 March 2014**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Entsch, Warren, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr ENTSCH** (Leichhardt) (11:42): I rise with a great deal of pleasure to support my colleague the member for Herbert's motion today. I choked a little when I listened to the contribution from the member for Blair, who was trying to suggest that all of these problems go back to the Howard era. Back in that time the funding from the federal government went directly to the state government, under Beattie and Bligh. As a member of the Howard government I remember expressing a great deal of frustration at the fact that we would allocate funding for a particular project and find that the state governments did not even have it on their priority list, let alone do any of the work associated with the planning, because at the end of the day it is the state governments that do the planning and enter into the contracts to do the construction. To give you a classic example, for years I was criticised by government for not doing anything on the Murray River section, which is down near Tully. They were saying it was all the federal government's fault that there was no money. I went to the Prime Minister at one stage and said, 'Let's call their bluff.' We actually allocated a very significant amount of money to the project, and the state government had to come back cap in hand and say, 'Sorry, we did not have that on our planning priority list for another eight years. If you want us to do it you are going to have to give us a million dollars to start planning it and another couple of million dollars to look at hydrology.' So there was no way in the world they could have done the work, even with the money that was allocated.

If you start reading a few headlines in the local daily newspaper for my region, the *Cairns Post*, on 31 August 2009 there was this: 'Bruce Highway a backroad killer'. I wonder who was in government then, I ask the member for Herbert. On 5 September 2009, less than a week later, the headline read 'Bruce Highway horror crash leaves town mourning'. These are the sorts of things we had when Labor was in government federally and in the state, so any suggestion that this has been a problem that has been created by us or by the Newman government is just an absolute nonsense.

More recently the tone of the headlines has been: January 2012, 'LNP will act quickly on Bruce'; April 2012, 'LNP moves on Bruce Highway'; July 2013, '\$8.5 billion highway pledge Abbott 'fix' for Bruce'; October 2013, 'Road to a better highway'; and November 2013, 'Push to spruce Bruce'. So there has been an acknowledgement that there is now a focus.

Nationally, the coalition government is committed to delivering the biggest infrastructure agenda in Australia's history, through our \$35.5 billion Infrastructure Investment Program. Of all the major projects under this program, I am extremely pleased to see that the Bruce Highway upgrade gets the biggest financial commitment of \$6.7 billion. That is incredible, and it shows a very significant commitment from our side of politics.

When I have a look at this, additional funding will be required but I think that this is a very significant start. You have got an area of 1,700 kilometres between Cairns and Brisbane. It is the major arterial road connecting Queensland's eastern seaboard to economic centres. The North Queensland Road Alliance estimates that the Bruce Highway contributes \$11.5 billion per annum to the Queensland economy and supports something like 60,000 jobs in North Queensland.

We have to say to you: Queensland government figures show that on average, every year, nine locations along the highway are closed for more than 48 hours due to flooding, and six of these locations are closed for more than five days a year. This causes economic paralysis in our region, and businesses that rely on road freight are stuck without supplies. It is absolutely critical that we make sure we get stuck into this and get the job done.

I am pleased to see that \$700 million will be spent mainly in my area. That includes \$300 million for the three stages of the Cairns southern access corridor—and some work had already started under Labor. Unfortunately, as is typical with Labor, they did not budget correctly so we have got to take money out to finish the job that they had committed to start but never put the money into.

There is also \$385 million for the Edmonton to Gordonvale duplication, which is absolutely critical. Another area that we have to focus on, and I will continue to push very strongly for, is the second access to Cairns. We are certainly working with local and state governments who are prepared to listen and plan into the future, because it opens up opportunities, and I look forward to getting that— (*Time expired*)