



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

BILLS

Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2013-2014

Consideration in Detail

SPEECH

Thursday, 6 June 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Date Thursday, 6 June 2013
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Questioner
Speaker Chester, Darren, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (10:29): It is always fascinating for members on this side to receive lectures about supposedly not been good with numbers when the member for Lilley has presided over the worst deficits in Australian history. I would like to take the minister to his opening comments where he referred to the future funding priorities in his budget. In particular I want to refer to the Princes Highway, not only in my electorate but also along the south coast of New South Wales.

The minister is well aware of both my concerns and the concerns of the member for Eden-Monaro about the state of the Princes Highway. Without wishing to be political on the issue, I think the highway between Sydney and Sale has probably been neglected and ignored by governments of both political persuasions. In fact, some parts of that highway are in a deplorable state. I do acknowledge that some work has been undertaken in the Eden-Monaro area, the Bega bypass and other areas under The National Road Network as an off-network project.

My particular interest, Minister, relates to the duplication project, which has been jointly funded between Traralgon and Sale, with \$140 million from the federal government and \$35 million from the state. The minister would be aware that the current funding for this project is set to expire with the completion of the stage between Stammers Road and Minniedale Road. I think the minister would be aware of that. There is concern within the community, within Latrobe City Council, Wellington Shire Council and the general public about whether future funding opportunities exist for that duplication work. I understand that the cost of the project is in the order of \$500 million and that \$175 million has been allocated to it. So I would be interested to know: where does the Princes Highway East, Traralgon to Sale, fit in the government's future funding priorities?

The second question I would like to ask the minister relates to an issue he may well be able to clarify for me—and that is, the \$20 million reprofiling that occurred, due to the EPBC Act issue, around the time of Queensland floods. I know the minister is aware of this issue. I am hoping to get some clarity about whether that funding has now flowed through to the actual project.

Perhaps more generally—and I invite the minister's comments on this particular issue—in terms of road-funding activities across Australia, I am particularly concerned about the amount of the road budget that is being redirected into issues relating to things such as the EPBC Act. The way in which we have been forced to move roads out of road reserves because of EPBC Act intervention, I think, is a concern for this government and future governments.

From my understanding of the EPBC Act, it was really meant to relate to issues of national significance, yet we are seeing local highway duplication projects being moved out of the road reserve onto private property at significant expense to the Commonwealth and the relevant state governments. I would invite the minister's comments: how significant an issue is this for our nation? How much road money allocated to the transport department is being diverted into these environmental issues, which are sometimes quite spurious? I would invite your comments on that, Minister.