



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



## **HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

### **Federation Chamber**

### **BILLS**

**Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2014-2015,  
Appropriation Bill (No. 2) 2014-2015,  
Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments)  
Bill (No. 1) 2014-2015, Appropriation Bill (No. 5)  
2013-2014, Appropriation Bill (No. 6) 2013-2014**

### **Second Reading**

### **SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 28 May 2014**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Wednesday, 28 May 2014  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Entsch, Warren, MP

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**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr ENTSCH** (Leichhardt) (10:01): I thank you for the opportunity to speak on Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2014-15 and cognate bills today. There is no hiding the fact that there has been some very highly vocal and predominantly negative reaction to the budget both before it came down and at the time it came down. I had concerns as well. In hindsight, I think we could have handled it better. I made this very public argument that we could have focused on a lot of the positives rather than on just the negatives, because people are genuinely concerned. But there is no doubt about it that the reason we are now in government and not the other side is that people realised that it had got out of control. They were desperate for somebody who was responsible to come in and clean up the mess and get the house back in order.

We had a similar challenge back in 1996. This budget is a tough budget, but it is a fair budget. We did it back in 1996 and I am confident that we can do it again. At the end of the day, as I say, when the party is over somebody has got to come in and clean up the mess. And that is what we are doing now. I believe this is a responsible budget. The previous government ran up five record deficits and left \$123 billion in future deficits and, without policy change, our debt was going to reach about \$667 billion. We are certainly repairing the budget and, in so doing, will strengthen the economy.

Instead of having Labor deficits of more than \$30 billion in 2017-18, it will be down to less than \$3 billion. That in itself will be quite an achievement. I recognise that the saving measures that we are putting forward will affect every sector of our society. By sharing the load, we certainly lighten it for everyone.

I have been asked a number of times what the budget means. My honest answer is that, as Chair of the Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia, the coalition's commitment to the development of Northern Australia fills me with a great deal of confidence. When we put down the report—and the white paper will come out at the end of this year—there will be a requirement for infrastructure funding. What chance would we have had if the deficit continued to go north? What chance would we have had if our government debt continued in that \$600 billion northern spiral? Everything is coming down, which gives me a great deal of confidence that, in the 2015 budget, there will be something there for infrastructure to get the Northern Australia white paper to become a reality. I can tell you now that there are many people in our region who are really looking forward to that. This budget sets the theme, if you like, to allow us to provide significant funding to make it become a reality.

When you look at what is in the budget now, there is another big difference. The others were throwing around promises like confetti, with \$200-odd million for the peninsular development—all this money was going everywhere. But when you looked behind it there were no dollars there. It was no more than a piece of paper.

In this budget we have recognised projects of great significance and great importance. The first one is \$6.7 billion for the Bruce Highway. I know you have also been actively involved in this campaign, Mr Deputy Speaker, with the eastern seaboard members. Now the money is actually in the tin and ready to be spent. It includes \$46.4 million for the Cairns Southern Access Corridor from Robert Road through to Foster Road. There is money to complete the job which was incomplete when we came in—they did not have enough to complete the job, so we are putting money into that as well.

We have actually put the cash in the tin now for \$210 million of Cape York infrastructure. These are little projects which are very important to us. The Mossman Botanical Gardens is something Alan Carle and Peter Wood and their team have been working on. It is a fantastic initiative to set up botanical gardens in a little place called Mossman, north of Port Douglas, basically featuring all the flowering trees of the Daintree Rainforest. We have put in \$1.4 million to allow them to acquire the site. Again, it is money in the bank, not hollow promises which never materialise.

It is great to see that we got the Black Spot funding. It was our initiative and has had an amazing impact on safety on our roads. In the Roads to Recovery program, bitumen has been laid throughout local authority areas

—again, a coalition initiative which we continue to support. With the remote airstrips program, I got a call today from the CEO from Pormpuraaw very concerned because Senator McLucas had put out a press release saying that we are going to cut it. It just shows you how little the other side understand what budgets are all about. We had actually budgeted the funding for 2014-15 and then we will be looking at priorities after that. Of course we are funding that. At the moment, Kowanyama air strip is in the final stage and that is all they have to look at—their next-door neighbour. They are doing the work. Lockhart River is doing the work. Again, Senator McLucas and shadow minister Albanese are scaremongering about it. But people know better. They see what is happening on the ground.

There is an investment of \$42 million in the Australian Institute of Tropical Health and Medicine at JCU. That money is now in the bank. We have budgeted for it, we have made the commitment, we have now locked it in. Cairns and the Torres Strait will benefit from a large chunk of this funding. Money is in the bank for the seawalls I have been talking about for the last three years, in spite of the fact that the other mob had promised it for years and years. Even when they eventually put out the press release, there was absolutely no money. That money is in the tin and they are starting the work right now.

We have been raising insurance for a long time. The response from the other side after the flood inquiry at the beginning of 2012 when there were nine recommendations—if they had taken the nine recommendations at the time, the problem may well have fixed itself. Rather than that, they played politics with it and blamed the state government. Then they said, 'Let's fix it with stamp duty for state governments.' That was the only recommendation they took out of it. They said, 'We'll have a look at it,' but they made it so constrained that nothing could come out of it.

An honourable member interjecting—

**Mr ENTSCHE:** As another Queenslander sitting on the other side, you should be ashamed. Three years we had to wait until we got into government before we started to do something about it. Now the \$12½ million will be going through to allow strata titles and body corporates to assess their properties and to shop around for insurance—a major step. The government actuarial report coming out I understand in the next couple of weeks will show very clearly the insurance companies in a very bad light.

There are a number of other initiatives that we are putting in there as well, that I have no doubt at all about. The aggregator website that is going in there was very effective when it was used in Europe. I am assured that these will actually make a difference. I can assure you that we have a lot more in our back pocket. I put the insurance companies on notice. They had better start coming to the table, because there is a lot of other stuff that will come there. If they are not prepared to play ball now, there are a lot of other things that will be legislated to make sure that they do. It would be nice to see the other side actually taking it a little bit more seriously. In the middle of an election campaign we had the former Prime Minister walk into Townsville and say, 'Insurance—there's a problem. I will make another promise.' But what did she do about it? She did absolutely nothing. I can assure you that one way or another we are going to fix this problem.

Mental health is another one which has been one of my babies for a long time. It is great to see that I was able to get the funding to continue the Cairns Mental Health Carers Support Hub, which has been finally sorted out. Adrienne Hicks has been absolutely brilliant. I would also like to congratulate Jeremy Audas, the CEO of the Mental Illness Fellowship North Queensland, based in Townsville. He has been a fabulous advocate. It is great to see. This will allow us to get a clubhouse established in Cairns and to fit another piece in the jigsaw of mental health. We also have additional funding for headspace—\$14.9 million to establish another 10 headspace sites and carry out another two-year evaluation. We also have \$18 million to establish—and this one is very important—a National Centre for Excellence in Youth Mental Health, an area where we desperately need some help.

In the Torres Strait—instead of taking assets out of areas, as we have seen with border protection and the mess that the other mob created—we are moving back into these areas and securing these borders. There are three new vessels being built to deal with the problems up there. They will deal with the current challenges. It is great to see the Customs and Border Protection Service moving to establish a northern coordinator role effectively as one operation, because there has always been a problem with agencies talking to each other and bringing a level of coordination. It is about time, and I congratulate the minister on bringing that together.

Youth unemployment is another issue. We have record youth unemployment in our area. The budget includes \$146 billion in welfare spending; \$12.2 billion will be spent on assistance for the unemployed and the sick. While

we have higher unemployment in our area, let me tell you that there are lots of jobs there. A lot of jobs, though, are filled by backpackers coming into the area, in dairy, fruit-picking and areas like that. There is no reason why our young people cannot be expected to go up there and do that work. Okay, it is only temporary work, but at the end of the day it allows them to get something in their resume to show they have actually turned up and done a day's work. It does not necessarily need to be full-time. Employers look at that to say, 'Yes, they are work ready.' That encourages them to do something else.

In Cairns there is a major problem for a lot of our young people. My son is in the same situation. He is 20 years of age and in university there. He cannot get a job for the love of money. Why can't he get a job? If he was under 18, he would be a junior and have a chance McDonald's and places like that. But if he is over 18 and he can only work on weekends or public holidays or at night-time, because of the inflexibility in the working arrangements—we are predominantly a tourism area, which means we have to be open when the tourists want us to be open—they cannot afford to employ people like that. So another area that we need to continue to work on is flexibility in the workplace, to allow young people like my son and many others to get an opportunity to do a bit of work.

I can say to you without a doubt that there are a lot of opportunities outside the region. I started my working life cleaning toilets in a railway station. It did not worry me at all. I did it well and it provided me an opportunity to do something else. We need to encourage people to do that. It is great to see that we have a Work for the Dole program going in Cairns. That is another way for people to get in there and start their working program, to get their work ethic established. It is fantastic to see that we are giving them a hand up and encouraging people to get in and to do this work. I am very excited about that.

There is also a lot of other work there. There is a scare campaign about the age pension, but the age pension is not being touched. And the pension supplement is not being touched despite what Labor says about that.

There are a whole range of other initiatives. Consolidating Aboriginal affairs and bringing it under the umbrella of a much smaller group means there will be more money on the ground instead of being blown out through bureaucratic processes.

Tourism funding is great news as well. In the 2014-15 budget there is \$130 million in base funding for Tourism Australia and \$13.5 million towards Asian marketing. Tourism Tropical North Queensland, Tourism Australia, the National Tourism Alliance and the Tourism and Transport Forum all agree that the government understands the economic importance of their industry. Of course, there is money in there as well for the Great Barrier Reef, which is also important. There are a small items like the \$400,000 for CCTV in our community, which I think is important.

The Rudd-Gillard government's six years of chaos, of waste and mismanagement, delivered higher taxes, record boat arrivals and debt and deficit as far as the eye could see. I think our economic action strategy, delivered through the budget, will strengthen the economy. It will create jobs and it will reduce Labor's debt to almost \$300 billion. We need to take action now or an even greater burden will fall on our community in the future. We are committed in this budget to clearing up the Labor Party's mess. I commend the bill to the House.