

Budget Reply Hansard – 17 June 2009

Mrs BUTLER (Lyons) - Mr Speaker, I rise today to support the State Budget for 2009-10 and to congratulate the Treasurer on the depth and clarity of the document. This is a budget that has the future firmly in mind, that makes tough decisions, that sees Tasmania set up with infrastructure that will provide for our children and our grandchildren, with Premier David Bartlett rolling up his sleeves and being prepared to set up the future for our fantastic State. Tasmania's economy has entered the current global downturn from a strong position, with high levels of household consumption, government expenditure and positive population growth. The public sector represents a larger share of economic activity in Tasmania than nationally. However, public sector investment in Tasmania will increase in 2009-10. Many of the major projects which are outlined in this Budget are planned for the seat of Lyons. Projects include the Brighton bypass and transport hub, irrigation and rail infrastructure.

As Tasmanians, we do not have the same rates of borrowing as those in other States. We have generally less inflated house prices and lower debt levels than in other States. Although household consumption spending has been stronger than nationally in recent quarters, for 2009-10 Tasmania's gross State product is forecast to decline by three-quarters of one per cent. The budget document covers a range of possible scenarios for the forward Estimates period. For example, a gradual recovery in household consumption is expected. However, if households respond to the worsening economic conditions by increasing their savings and deferring purchases of major expenditures such as motor vehicles or holidays, then consumption would be down and our economy would be more vulnerable. Three of Tasmania's major export markets, Japan, Taiwan and Korea, are expected to contract in 2009, according to the IMF.

China provides hope for Tasmania's exports, which continue to be dominated by processed metal and metal products and ores and concentrates. Indeed, I was told by informed sources that Nyrstar recently purchased six zinc mines. While they are saving \$1 million a month over two years, starting last September, they are still prepared to invest in the future to that extent, so that is a sure sign that they have confidence in the future.

Mr Speaker, over the last decade the Labor Government has produced a number of measures to reform and modernise our economic base through improved diversification. The energy sector has been transformed to allow more competition and security. Basslink's entry into the National Electricity Market, the Tasmanian natural gas project and the development of the wind generation industry in Tasmania have reduced our reliance on the Hydro's water storage and contributed to improving our energy supply, therefore improving security for our businesses, large and small.

The number of people employed in the Tasmanian retail sector between 2002-08 has increased from 23 100 to 28 100. Changes to the Liquor and Accommodation Act have ended fees and promoted

competition, and new businesses such as specialist wine shops and a wider range of accommodation options have evolved. This is especially evident in the tourism areas of the east coast, where there are now more wine shops and various forms of accommodation which are market-driven rather than relying on the old star rating system. I believe you have probably explored some of those yourself, Mr Speaker.

Interestingly, many ex-tradespeople, in addition to professionals, who aspire to running their own small businesses, have developed these terrific additions to our tourism product, and they continue to give our visitors a more enjoyable and memorable visit with more stories to tell when they go home, and that is one of the best things about tourism.

The improvements to the provision of water and sewerage services in this State have addressed years of politicking to the detriment of public health for both Tasmanians and visitors. Three regional corporations - Southern Water, Ben Lomond Water and Cradle Mountain Water - will replace the bulk water authorities in local government councils. Finally and courageously, the delivery of water and sewerage will be organised on a sustainable footing, providing a commercial return to the owners, Tasmania's councils, thus ensuring positive public health and economic outcomes.

In another step to support the business sector, and thus to provide improved employment opportunities, the issue of taxation has been modernised. Whereas a decade ago the Government collected more than 25 taxes, Tasmania has reformed the system ahead of other States, and in 2009-10 only 14 taxes will be collected. State revenue will be approximately \$203 million lower than it would have been, but the compliance and administration costs faced by Tasmanian businesses are reduced, particularly for the 70 per cent of registered payroll taxpayers in Tasmania who also operate in other Australian jurisdictions. Economic growth is stimulated by reducing costs to businesses and that is one of the things that we are about.

Mr Speaker, the provision of optic-fibre cable between our island and mainland Australia and the subsequent construction of optic fibre as the backbone in connection with the gas trench has meant that we have access to pipeline trenches for the installation of conduit for optic fibre. Competition will deliver wider choice for the Tasmanian community and industries that are dependent on broadband Internet access.

The context for a brighter future has been set by good policies such as those mentioned, good work by many agencies and departments over the last decade, and a vision that has gone on among Labor members.

Another aspect of this forward planning and commitment to a more flexible and diversified economy occurs in this Government's commitment to the development of major infrastructure. The planned level of infrastructure investment is \$745.7 million in 2009-10, an increase of \$375.7 million on the 2008-09 budget allocations. The Australian Government's Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan will provide infrastructure investment in Tasmania of \$307.9 million in 2009-10.

The total Education infrastructure expenditure is \$240.8 million. In the seat of Lyons, funding of \$8 million has been provided for a Bridgewater child and family centre which is due to be completed by June 2013, which is part of the redevelopment of education infrastructure in Bridgewater in the southern Midlands area. I am especially excited about the development of these child and family centres which will support families with the health, care and education of children from birth to four years. I was reminded the need for the centre when talking to parents at Bridgewater on Monday last, when some people came into the office and were talking about very personal issues to do with child-raising. I was able to refer them on but if there was a dedicated centre there then it would be much simpler and, I would imagine, must faster to get help. Parents need somewhere they can go to talk about a problem they might be having where they can trust the advice and the professionalism of the people providing the service. These centres will provide parenting programs, early learning support, health services, early identification of children with special needs and access to adult learning and training. The scoping process has begun and capital funding of \$27.4 million will be provided in 2009-10. Eight centres have been identified so far.

A Learning and Information Network Centre is planned for Sorell in the Lyons electorate and will improve access to skills and training with the framework of lifelong learning.

In a step that will help in providing additional qualified child carers, in this Budget \$250 000 is provided to target recognition of existing child-care skills as formal qualifications within the sector. This provides another positive pathway for our child carers, and I was happy to be discussing this at a national level recently in Canberra.

Further exciting reforms for our schools are given allocations in this Budget. These include the very successful and popular Raising the Bar and Closing the Gap, the Premier's Reading Strategy, early childhood reform, greater community use of school facilities, fuelling the education revolution and reducing class sizes.

This Budget also provides \$9.3 million for the second year of a \$30-million, four-year investment to establish contemporary education facilities as part of the Bridgewater and southern Midlands renewal project. This is a special interest of mine because I used to teach there during the 1980s. I have a special fondness for that site and just looking at it brings back so many memories so I look forward to being involved more and more with that project.

Mr Speaker, as an east coast resident and Lyons member, I am thrilled that the St Helens barway project has been started and I might tell you that the locals are very excited about this; there is equipment rolling in as we speak. An amount of \$2.5 million has been provided in the initial stage and ongoing funding \$1.5 million per annum for the next four years will see sand from behind the training wall moved with the aim of reducing the amount of sand that has accumulated at the opening of main channel into Georges Bay. It is hoped that a significant difference will be made to the economy for the coming fishing and summer recreational boating seasons. Safety and access for all users is a necessity for this terrific port with its first-class infrastructure and the town certainly needs the businesses that commercial fishing generates. It also needs the upgrades to the Service Tasmania shop, which are included under the capital investment program.

Changes at the LGH will also benefit the people of Lyons. The integrated care centre focusing on non-emergency services and short-stay elective services will have a spend of \$5.6 million during 2009-10. Upgrades to the acute medical assessment unit, the surgical services unit and the intensive care unit will provide patient assessment, early treatment and care planning through spending of \$15 million in this allocation. An amount of \$15 million will be provided over two years for a new multistorey car park that will provide parking for 400 additional cars. The emergency department at the LGH will have \$8 million spent on redevelopment and extra floor space.

Ongoing funding of \$2 million has been provided for ambulances as part of the 2006 commitment to purchasing 100 new vehicles over four years. This is part of a terrific commitment of \$48 million to the Tasmanian Ambulance Service which does such a marvellous job all around the State. Additional paramedics will be located in communities across the State including Triabunna and Nubeena, where local people are proud of their services. Further upgrades will be spent on ambulance stations and residences on the Tasman Peninsula and the east coast. I must say that the Government has shown great commitment to the ambulance service during the last 10 years when I used to lobby Judy Jackson about improving service delivery to the east coast and Sorell, which at that time were lacking, having inherited the situation from the Liberals.

Further work will be carried out on the onsite surveillance security at Ashley Youth Detention Centre through the installation of closed-circuit television. In continuation of the 2008 policy of Paul Lennon and Minister Lara Giddings the payment scheme for people who were abused while in State care has been allocated \$13.38 million, reflecting our anticipated increase in ex gratia payments.

There are many much-needed projects listed for funding under the Urban Renewal and Heritage Fund, projects that will benefit the communities who have worked hard to develop and support them over many years. In the seat of Lyons, the beautiful heritage town of Oatlands - very familiar to you, Mr Speaker - will soon have the overhead power lines replaced by underground lines. Given the traditional street lights there, the Georgian colonial streetscape will be greatly enhanced.

I always imagine that as a film set. I think it is ready to have a brilliant Tasmanian film there. Five hundred thousand dollars has been budgeted for restoration of the jailer's residence at Oatlands. I have seen the degradation there myself, but believe that there is good potential for further heritage and consequent tourism opportunities, especially for tourists interested in early colonial law and justice and the stories that will flow from that legal system. I do not know whether other members have seen that there are often interactive re-enactments of cases that have gone on in some of Scottish towns, for instance, and they are just fascinating to go and watch. They have reality graphics made up from actual photos of the people in these cases, and they re-enact the cases in the setting, so it really hits home. So I hope good things like that can occur there.

At Swansea, as outlined by the Premier, \$90 000 will be used to extend the existing walking track from the bowls club to the walkway at the eastern end of Jubilee Beach. I have spent many a beautiful sunrise walk, when living in Swansea, overlooking the Freycinet Peninsula. A much-needed redevelopment of the Swansea Heritage Museum will include refurbished toilets, disability access and a much-needed visitor information centre. There is a terrific collection there, but some of the clothing is starting to get rust spots on it et cetera, and there is a bit of degradation occurring because it is not temperature-controlled.

The iconic Port Arthur is part of the seat of Lyons. The \$2 million annual payout to the authority represents funding provided under the 2005-10 agreement to support conservation work. Both the Port Arthur and Coal Mines historic sites are part of the Australian convict sites nomination being assessed for placement on the World Heritage list - as is Maria Island. These attractions are part of the unique experience that differentiates us from other destinations for tourists, as are our magnificent flora and fauna and our fresh air.

The tourism figures for the year ending in March 2009 are a fantastic result for this sector, and substantiate what has been reported to me. Some 896 800 visitors to our State, including 14 per cent more holiday visitors, is especially positive when compared with nation-wide figures showing that interstate visitation dropped by 10 per cent. Most operators that I have spoken to are using this quieter winter period to re-energise themselves and to refurbish and repaint their establishments, because they did not have time to do so last year.

As part of the \$80 million Water Infrastructure Fund established in 2007-08, \$27.1 million will be provided to the Rivers and Water Supply Commission and the Tasmanian Irrigation Development Board to continue to bring water to the Midlands. Tunbridge, as outlined by Minister Jim Cox, will have a new more comfortable fire station, and appliances will be upgraded around the State. In 2009-10, 14 heavy tanker appliances will be fabricated, and one heavy pump for purchase. This is a terrific response to the increasing threat that we face every summer of seeing our fantastic bush go up in flames.

The hard-working Infrastructure minister, Graeme Sturges, has spoken eloquently and frequently about the Brighton bypass, the Lyell Highway upgrade, planning for the Bagdad bypass, and the Brighton transport hub funded through joint programs with the Australian Government.

Mr Gutwein - It is the first time I have heard Mr Sturges called 'eloquent'.

Mrs <BUTLER> - I see him in a different light perhaps from you. Smaller scale projects to be funded in 2009-10 include upgrading the Illawarra Main Road and Poatina Road, finalising work at Tea Tree Road, work in the Central Highlands and improving the Sorell junction of the Tasman and Arthur Highways. Improvements will also be made along the Frankford Main Road, the Evandale Main Road - I am sure you have been involved in that one, Mr Polley - the Mud Walls secondary road and the Lyell Highway at Ellendale.

Mr SPEAKER - I was born near there.

Mrs <BUTLER> - The tricky little single-lane bridge at Goshen will be realigned and made into a dual-lane bridge with smoother approaches, therefore improving the safety aspects of this challenging bridge over the Georges River.

I am proud to support this prudent and measured Budget. It has been constructed with care and due diligence, care for the people of Tasmania and the diligence that is needed in an unsure economic and fiscal context, where international forces must have some effect, but where small business in particular, small business that is the backbone of Tasmanians' enterprise, can make the most of their opportunities. Let us work together. I commend this bill to the House.