



# Legislative Council

## Budget Estimates And Related Papers

18/10/95

### Hansard

### Extract

**The Hon. JANELLE SAFFIN** [9.23]: It is with a great deal of pride and pleasure that I come to address the House this evening on the occasion of my first speech in Parliament in this budget debate. At the outset I pay tribute to a number of people. I pay tribute to my colleagues in the great Australian Labor Party who urged me to enter this House, with a special tribute to my friend and colleague the Hon. Ann Symonds. I pay tribute to the conference of the Australian Labor Party which preselected me and to my leader in the House, the Treasurer, the Hon. Mike Egan - it was a conference at which our political fates became somewhat entwined. To the people of New South Wales who voted for me I offer my gratitude. I am pleased to take my place in this House with my north coast colleagues, the Hon. Dr B. P. V. Pezzutti, the Hon. R. S. L. Jones, and the Hon. I. Cohen, and I would say that the north coast is certainly well represented in this House.

In my first speech to Parliament I want to lay before the Council in the broad context of this budget debate some of the themes I shall develop

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subsequently in debates in this House - ideas and themes which motivate my thinking or which I believe need to be followed by this Parliament in the pursuit of peace and good order for the citizens of New South Wales. Perhaps I should commence by stating that my membership and espousal of the platform of the Australian Labor Party, which I represent in this Chamber, was for me a natural choice. As an early school leaver, I early learnt how hard it was on the factory floor. And my experience continues to be the experience of ordinary workers, but especially women who, already earning less pay than their male counterparts, have been induced into agreeing to enterprise agreements without the protection of unions in bodies such as Tweed Valley Fruit Processors in which such basic rights as the right to sick leave are negotiated away in the name of micro-economic reform and productivity.

I should like to indicate to honourable members some people who have inspired me and, I have no doubt, will inspire members of this Council even though we may be far apart politically. The first person is Charlie Davidson, who was a member of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly and represented the seat of Cobar from 1918 until his death in 1949 and was Minister for Public Works in the Lang Labor Government. I mention his career because of his unswerving commitment to social justice for Aboriginal people throughout his parliamentary career. On the north coast of this State the population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is twice the national average. There is also a large number of the forgotten people - descendants of South Sea Island people who were brought to these shores, many if not all against their will, to work cutting sugarcane. I draw the attention of honourable members to page 17 of the social justice budget statement, which spells out budget provisions for Aboriginal people. The statement reports:

The Government is taking a co-ordinated, whole of Government approach to Aboriginal Affairs by establishing a new Cabinet Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and a new Department of Aboriginal Affairs reporting to the Deputy Premier . . .

The high profile in government which that committee has been given indicates the level of commitment of this Labor Government to reduce the inequity experienced by Aboriginal people in the delivery of and access to basic services. Charlie Davidson was a union member and was largely responsible for the formation of the Cobar branch of the Amalgamated Miners Association. Soon after his election to the New South Wales Legislative Assembly he travelled widely around his electorate, and was appalled at the conditions under which many of his constituents were forced to live. He saved his most trenchant criticism, however, for the way in which Aborigines were treated by government agencies. He was quick to take up their cause and for years sought to reveal to the Parliament the tragic results of neglect, mismanagement and inhuman treatment. His perseverance was rewarded when, against strong opposition, in 1937 he was appointed to chair the select committee on the administration of the Aborigines Protection Board.

It is to the eternal shame of the cover-up politics of 1938 - the year of the Aboriginal walk off of Cumeragunja - that his committee was not given permission to report before the prorogation of the Parliament. It is further shame that the evidence collected by the inquiry about the unjust treatment of Aborigines in New South Wales was not published. Only a single typescript copy appears to survive in the Premier's bundles in the New South Wales State archives. The story of support and encouragement given to Davidson by women in the New South Wales feminist society is part of the as yet unwritten history of New South Wales. It is important that we do not forget that this Council since its inception has been an active participant in the creation of legislation that has impacted so heavily upon the lives of Aboriginal people in this State. Charlie Davidson stands as a reminder to this Parliament of the need never to lose sight of the social justice dimension of government. The second person I want to refer to is Emma Miller. Although most people may not have even heard of her, a marble bust of Emma Miller sits in the Trades and Labor Council in Brisbane. Her biographer said of her:

. . . [she was] a woman of courage, fearless in expressing her convictions and staunch in her beliefs. A recognised leader of Queensland women's fight for the right to vote and a friend and organiser of women workers, and an active supporter of the Trade Union movement . . .

I spent the first half of my life growing up in Queensland and it was the place where I came to know about Emma Miller, so members will forgive me my indulgence. Emma was a delegate to the fourth political Labor conference held in Brisbane in 1908. At that time she wrote:

. . . The reason why I believe in the Labor Party is because it is the only party that stands for Justice and Humanity against the privileges and power of the capitalist class. That is why I would urge every toiler, man and woman, to vote solid Labor for both Federal and State Parliaments.

Her call of justice before privilege is one which is easy to repeat. But the abuse of privilege and power leads, as we are hearing daily, to corruption, crime and oppression. I am not seeking to claim that members of the Australian Labor Party have an

absolute monopoly on social justice - I think there would be some who would say that we have not. But I believe, by and large, as does the Australian Labor Party, as instanced in the debates and speeches of Prime Minister Keating, Premier Bob Carr and a former Premier, Neville Wran, at the recent New South Wales State conference of the ALP, and as did the 800 rank and file delegate members attending the conference from around New South Wales believe passionately, that a social justice agenda is fundamental to the party in its reformist program. I agree with what the Treasurer said in another place in his Budget Speech.

... This is every inch a Labor Budget, a Budget that delivers social reform - the very purpose of Labor's existence ...

In this regard I refer to two people who are my contemporaries, and who are today carrying on in the mould of Charlie Davidson and Emma Miller. Both

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of them are trade union organisers; both of them work in areas where this first Labor budget has begun to undo some great injustices which the previous coalition Government visited upon ordinary working men and women and children in New South Wales. Those wrongs give the appearance of having been driven by ideology without sufficient consideration of the widespread social impacts of the actions of the coalition Government of the day.

The first is Carmel Cook, an organiser for the Australian Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union. I had the privilege of working with Carmel in the Northern Rivers area before she moved to Newcastle on behalf of her union. As part of the Miscellaneous Workers Union coverage is cleaning and cleaning contractors, Carmel was responsible for organising the resistance to and negotiations over the actions of the previous administration to privatise the school cleaning service. I was able to observe Carmel's commitment to her members and to the fight for justice for a group, mostly women, who could easily have ended up on the employment scrap heap because of the privatisation imperative which seemed to drive the previous administration.

In this regard I am pleased that country classrooms will share in the \$18 million announced in the recent State Labor budget as allocated for extra school cleaning. The money will be used to ensure that carpeted areas will be vacuumed on a daily basis, shampooed every year, and the desks are damp wiped every day. That may sound a small matter but, in the context of children's health, including children who are affected by dust-related allergies and asthma, a condition with which I am familiar, it is an important matter going right to the heart of wellbeing. The fulfilment of this election promise by Mr Aquilina is pleasing not only to me but to parents, children and teachers across New South Wales. I was a vocal critic of the previous administration's false economies in privatising the school cleaning service at the expense of those women's jobs and children's wellbeing. The wave of protests from parents and teachers which followed showed that people will not tolerate short cuts and penny-pinching which potentially put at risk the health of country kids.

The second person to whom I want to refer is Mick Lawler, based in Tamworth. Mick is an organiser with the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union. I have known Mick for a number of years, and am aware of his being prepared to drive hundreds of miles, as one has to in regional New South Wales, to act in support of an agreed community priority. Without someone like Mick more and more workers and subcontractors would be sent to the wall by companies which maximise their profits by rotting the system at the expense of those who cannot afford to bear that burden. Examples could be given of companies from outside the region which have sent local contractors to the wall by refusing to meet their final payments.

There is a need to review and re-establish in this State a code of best practice in consultation with industry and the unions - a code developed especially for regional New South Wales, a code which has teeth so that the rorters are locked out and so that decent people can ply their trade. Large companies which use their muscle and fraud to lock out legitimate regional contractors through such practices as the one mentioned above, avoiding living away allowances in the award by sending employees ahead of projects to live in caravan parks and qualify as locals, ripping off apprentices, where they are employed, and avoiding training needs, are a heavy weight for regional New South Wales to bear. It means the locking out of the trades of thousands of young people from regional New South Wales. It is practices such as these which run counter to the best interests of the nation.

It is unforgivable that the previous Government, through its building industry task force, sought to intimidate and silence true-blue Australians like Mick Lawler who really do work for the battlers against established privilege in our society. On behalf of Mick Lawler and his colleagues and workers I thank the Attorney General for axing that abomination called the building industry task force. I have seen Mick Lawler in a second role which some of my Labor colleagues would not have seen nor imagined. I have seen him advocating the need for regional development and cooperation between parties who had never cooperated before, to produce wealth and jobs in regional Australia.

An example of that ability is when, in organising a regional economic development push in New England, Mick organised discussions between Tony Windsor, member for Tamworth, Peter Pulley from the Tamworth Development Corporation and others to meet with the successful Northern Rivers group, NOREDO, in Lismore to talk about developing a similar organisation to drive jobs and prosperity in the New England region. Unionists in regional New South Wales have been centrally involved together with representatives of commerce and industry in the Federal Government's regional development program. Unfortunately, under the previous administration union representation on regional development boards did not occur, in spite of the published guidelines for application for board membership.

In fact, opposition to placing representatives of trade unions on the regional development boards, and using placement on the boards at least in some instances as a reward for faithful service rather than for capacity to serve the regional community, has been widely recognised. The partnership which is being built between unions, employers and industry associations in regional New South Wales is exciting and productive, particularly in northern New South Wales but increasingly within other regions. That partnership will underpin the Treasurer's Budget Speech reference to winning jobs.

In his Budget Speech the Treasurer announced that the Government will be releasing a green paper on its State and regional development strategies, and that 1996 will be regarded by the Government as the year of regional development. One of the most striking features of Australia's growth has been the concentration of development in a few large

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metropolitan areas and the relative neglect of the vast underdeveloped regions. In New South Wales, Sydney has occupied that position, and its continued growth and dominance historically, for regional New South Wales, has become symbolic of the power of centralisation.

With only a few exceptions, for over a century all major decisions relating to the regions' priorities have been taken in Sydney. Despite the best efforts of regional development boards and community lobbies over the years, the regions, and especially my own north coast region, remain the Cinderella of New South Wales. That is in spite of the optimistic belief that non-metropolitan New South Wales had the capacity to contribute to the State's prosperity, if only fundamental priorities were recognised. As George Nesbitt, a member of the Nationalist Party representing the seat of Lismore in the early 1920s, concluded after a career spent attempting to get government in Macquarie Street to provide infrastructure which met the needs of the region rather than the needs of Sydney commerce, said:

... I've got to say that, no matter which party is in power, Sydney is in power ...

That has been one of my political mantras which I will cite without fear or favour, whether in opposition or in government. More recently, another famous young Australian, Poppy King, was quoted as saying that she had thought that anything important that happened in Australia took place in Sydney or Melbourne until she went on tour to outback Australia. So it is an attitude that prevails right across Australia. In my regional area in the northern rivers of northern New South Wales, for over a century community leaders believed that governments would respond to regional needs on the merits of a case. I am sure my female colleagues would be familiar with the merit argument. Over a period of almost 150 years the region has been the focus of an enormous effort in human terms to turn regional aspirations into realities. These efforts have almost invariably ended in frustration. I have to say that those who believe economic rationalism is something new do not know much about the history of New South Wales regional economics in relation to capital works projects.

The Northern Rivers Regional Economic Development Organisation is a regional organisation which covers the area from the Queensland border to Grafton, the fastest growing region in Australia. That unique group was launched on 3 December 1993, born of a frustration to drive real jobs and to see that the region's priorities were met. As NOREDO argues, a small industries base and a rapidly growing population do not fit easily together. At that time the North Coast Combined Unions Committee, a committee of the provincial trades and labour councils, determined that little help would come out of the capital city to change the very poor industry base in northern New South Wales - a function, the unions suggested, of distance from Sydney, almost continuous conservative political representation, and complicated red tape impediments to regional development.

It was unionists such as Carmel Cook, Mick Lane and Leo Bugden and combined unions coordinator, Dr Jim Gallagher, who found a receptive ear, especially with the Northern Rivers Regional Organisation of Councils secretary, Chris Clare. Together with the Chamber of Manufactures, the Regional Development Board and Southern Cross University, they put in place the steering committee which has become NOREDO. NOREDO now has a membership of 27 regional bodies, ranging across the three tiers of government, union and employer bodies, commerce and farming interests, green and manufacturing agendas, social development and training providers, as well as representatives from Federal and State agencies and the major political parties, to support, coordinate and drive appropriate regional economic development. Such wide representation allows NOREDO to speak with one united regional voice on regional issues.

NOREDO has undertaken the development of a regional economic development strategy which reflects a shared vision for the region, a vision of appropriate sustainable economic development which addresses the need for increased wealth and jobs, while preserving and enhancing the region's environmental heritage. That vision and strategy, developed as it has been through extensive regional consultation, has set a number of regional priorities which will be the basis on which the region will work to secure the future for its people. Coordination of both Federal and State government programs into the regions is really required to support and enhance those priorities and to avoid duplication of effort. I predict that that will be one of the matters we will pursue vigorously in 1996, the year of regional development. An initiative put in place by the previous coalition Government is a regional coordinator in the Premier's Department. That is a pilot program with two positions, one in Lismore and, I believe, one in Dubbo. Currently about 14 State government departments are involved and it is a very useful project for regional New South Wales, one that I recommend we continue.

An example of wasteful duplication, almost competition, is that the announcement late in 1994 by Deputy Prime Minister Howe, as he then was, of two projects identified in the NOREDO strategy - land use and export - saw state departments announce almost identical projects within a matter of weeks. Impossible to believe, but it is true. People are always more productive when they work together, and so are governments. Wasteful State-Federal-regional rivalry resulting in duplication of services is not serving Australia well. Hilmer might have been steadied up if he had an opportunity to examine rivalry between governments in Australia. NOREDO has already set in place a cooperatives land use project, largely funded by the Federal Government's Better Cities program and now in partnership with the State Department of Urban Affairs and Planning and NOROC. The project aims to, among other matters, deliver certainty to industry appropriate to the region, so that, as Prime Minister Keating so aptly put it:

... no investor is going to come into the region with three million bucks in their pocket if they are likely to get into a blue next week ...

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The region has already initiated a formal process to pursue conflict resolution in forest issues, and is planning similar initiatives in other areas of development and environmental conflict within the region. An example of this process was the conference held on 10 March this year entitled "The Future for a Sustainable Forestry Industry in the Northern Rivers Region". Common ground was found in a number of areas, and the meeting helped to establish a climate for cooperation in the land utilisation study. More importantly for the people of the region, NOREDO aided the process of a regional response to the Draft Deferred Forest Assessment Report for the New South Wales timber industry.

The regional task force set up to develop a response to the DFA proposals for submission to the task force, and representatives of the North East Forest Alliance met on 9 October. After a detailed exchange of information about the submissions of each group, it was agreed that each would develop their own response to the DFA proposal, but would meet prior to the submission of their responses to determine the extent of common ground. That meeting took place on Friday, 13 October. The submission placed before the task force yesterday in Canberra is therefore informed by the views of both the conservation and timber interests. Comment back by industry and conservationists is that the process is to be endorsed and that they received an excellent hearing.

I have taken the time to provide detail of a process which is being developed by the northern rivers region to deal with its own problems and conflicts, and its own priorities. What regional New South Wales is beginning to

say to government is that if change is to occur, we must tackle our problems ourselves because no-one else is going to do it for us. We must do it ourselves. The role of government, both at the State and Federal level, must surely be to support regional priorities which have been developed through proper consultation, and not to attempt to say "We know what is best for you", as State governments particularly have done since the beginning of self-government in New South Wales. If, Treasurer, at the end of 1996 we can show that this is what the Government is doing, we will have succeeded in regional development.

My colleague the Hon. I. M. Macdonald, in his contribution to the budget debate, put before the House detail of the Inland Marketing Corporation, and to further develop my theme of regional unity and self-help for regional development I shall mention the IMC as well. The Inland Marketing Corporation has been set up under the four councils to pull together a coordinated marketing program aimed at direct rural export of perishable produce. The aim of the corporation is to effect change in the inland eastern Australian region, from production to market-driven agriculture. IMC's managing director believes that a multimodal international freight facility at Parkes would draw products for export from the New South Wales border to west of the Blue Mountains, Victoria, South Australia and even Western Australia, to handle the overflow in peak season production of lobsters and cut flowers. Last week the *Sunday Telegraph* and the *Sun Herald* reported the push towards marketing Albury-Wodonga as a regional conference centre.

Regional New South Wales has never been able to compete on a level playing field with Sydney, simply because what infrastructure there was advantaged only N-S-W - Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong. State Governments, by and large, have been seen in non-metropolitan New South Wales as governing on behalf of city interests. In that regard, the recognition by this Government that reforms in the forestry industry will impact on the forestry industry and forestry workers, and that money will be provided to assist industry restructuring, is welcomed. There are many small communities whose sole reason for being is centred around forest and mill operations. There appears to be a growing appreciation by both sides of the forest debate of the socioeconomic dimensions of what is happening in small communities along the north coast, and we must all work to temper strategies and demands with compassion.

Solutions such as those announced by Ford Timbers within the northern rivers region - restructuring, upgrading and streamlining operations to create a sustainable and competitive business with an enhanced prosperity both for management and the workers - must be where the future lies. It is also important for governments to coordinate and extend the availability of funding for the development of hardwood plantations. It is more than a shame that this process was not begun years ago - and we should all share in that shame - on a scale sufficient to support the State's needs. The amount of \$8.5 million to fund the development of 3,000 hectares of additional hardwood plantations is a good beginning. What this Labor budget promises for regional New South Wales is that at last we can as a State begin to address the impediments to regional development - in-built costs, decision-making processes, et cetera - which prevent, say, northern rivers from competing against southern Queensland for industry development because of electricity costs, amongst other things

This first Carr Labor budget has begun opening the door to allow regional New South Wales to join the main game. While other governments have talked a lot about tackling the hard questions, this Government has done it. In spite of the predictions of gloom and doom from some commentators in the run up to the budget, this Government has boosted agriculture in rural New South Wales, established the Office of Rural Communities, and recognised that halting the spiralling cost of school transport must be applied differentially in regional New South Wales to maintain equity for New South Wales rural families. Our rural policies about land clearing and water are sensible and long overdue. Our boosting of drought relief and rural assistance by \$84 million, and our public review and consultation process concerning the rural land protection boards based on the previous Government's report produced by Coopers and

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Lybrand - all these things and more show that this Labor Government is about governing for all New South Wales.

Jobs in the rural sector will only come with an increase in rural wealth. Most of the industries within my region, northern rivers, employ less than 10 people. Yet because of the rapid population growth we need to create about 4,000 jobs per year just to stand still. The industry associations within the region have recently signed a memorandum of cooperation with the Northern Rivers Regional Economic Development Organisation. It was signed by the unions and witnessed by the Minister for Small Business and Regional Development, Mr Scully. That memorandum of cooperation pledges that groups such as the regional chambers of commerce, New South Wales Farmers, the Master Builders Association and the Chamber of Manufacturers will work with the unions and NOREDO to create almost 2,000 new sustainable jobs in the private sector over the next 12 months. It is an exciting partnership, underpinned by the argument that people are more productive when they work together. This will place the region in a position to win jobs, as the Treasurer referred to in his Budget Speech:

... We will then be targeting those industries and firms with a major marketing onslaught to highlight the natural advantages we have, and the competitive advantages we're forging, particularly during the period of international focus which the 2000 Olympics give us ...

I thank honourable members for extending the courtesy of hearing me in silence and for their forbearance in sitting through my lengthy speech. I extend my thanks to the Premier and the Treasurer for giving me a good Labor budget to speak to for my first time in this House. As a Labor colleague, I must say: well done.