



Speech by


**Fiona Simpson**

**MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE**

Hansard Thursday, 16 June 2011

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**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL;  
COMMUNITY AMBULANCE COVER LEVY REPEAL AND REVENUE  
AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—LNP) (4.33 pm): The Treasurer, Andrew Fraser, reminds me of the Iraqi information officer: as the bombs fell, as the plaster cracked and scattered around their feet—as the disaster of that situation unfolded—there was the Iraqi information officer saying, ‘No, there’s no problem. We’re fine. Nothing happening here to worry about.’ It seems that that mantra has been taken on by this deceitful government. It has ample spin doctors to say that it has a policy and a plan, but when we look at its track record we see that it is just another hollow promise waiting to be broken.

We are now in a situation where this state has lost its AAA credit rating. We are now in a situation where this state has seen major assets sold, but still the debt continues to climb. We are now in a situation where this government promised that it was going to cut the waste, cut the red tape and actually stimulate the local economy, and it broke its promise. There was an announcement from this government in the budget that miraculously it was going to cut the red tape now—another repeated promise—by creating a new position, a business commissioner whose task it will be to undertake this role. But let me remind the people of Queensland: the last time this government promised to cut red tape and help small businesses in this state, what did it do? It increased the cost of doing business in this state. In fact, it increased the amount of red tape by more than 13 per cent in a period of just over 12 months. In terms of anything this government says it is going to do, we see the opposite manifest. That is once again the very danger in the promises that this government makes to the people of Queensland.

We look at this government’s track record and we know that it is lying to the people of Queensland, and once again the people of Queensland will pay the price. When there has been mismanagement by this government, who pays for it? Who pays the price? It is ordinary Queenslanders who pay the price when they go to pay their petrol bill at the bowser, because this government lied to the people of Queensland and imposed a petrol tax.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Ryan): Order! Member for Maroochydore, you know that that language is unparliamentary and I ask you to withdraw it.

**Ms SIMPSON:** I withdraw. This government deliberately misled the people of Queensland and imposed a petrol tax by taking away the full tax rebate. This government deliberately and wantonly misled the people of Queensland by promising not to sell the assets that the people of Queensland were so proud of and had an investment in, and then it went ahead and did that. We now see a situation where these assets have been flogged off but the debt continues to rise, as does the waste of this government—\$540,000 an hour for peak debt interest repayments, and that is to be paid by all of those people—ordinary Queenslanders—who look at their bills caused by this government.

There has been an increase in the amount of taxation this government expects Queenslanders to fork out, and now we see another dead brake—a lead in the saddlebags; in fact a concrete weight—on a

struggling economy with the impact upon our housing market. What this state government has done with the increase in stamp duty is being heralded with cries of greater distress in an economy that is already struggling, and this government has no idea. So it has a business commissioner that it says will miraculously now cut red tape while it had an Office for Regulatory Efficiency which failed to do that. Where did that Office for Regulatory Efficiency sit? In Treasury! I have no doubt that there are some good people who are seeking to do their job there, but there is a very important message that comes from this: despite all of the hot air and the spin doctoring by this Treasurer, the government has lost control. It is unable to control the regulation of its own entities, even from Treasury. It has lost the discipline of good government. It has lost the discipline of even understanding what is good government. Once again, the people and our local economy are paying.

The situation with waste in this state is one where the government wastes the money and Queenslanders pay the cost. We say that it is time to cut the waste, and more can be done to help people in effective service delivery. There is a litany of examples of this government wasting money, and there are some simple answers in respect of saving money. The first thing is that you have to admit where there have been mistakes made so you do not keep making them. I think that is pretty basic, but does this government do it? No! It will not admit that it has made any mistakes, but it keeps making them. We know that of the \$7 billion spent on the water grid at least \$2 billion was completely flushed down the drain—flushed down the drain except for that nasty sting in the tail, and that is that ordinary Queenslanders are paying for it through their increased water bills. We have seen a situation where \$600 million was spent on a Traveston Dam that was never built; half a billion dollars—\$500,000—is being spent currently, as we speak, on the northern pipeline interconnector 2; the desalination plant has largely been mothballed and has rusted at a value of \$1.1 billion; and the budget of the Western Corridor Recycled Water Project has seen a blow-out of more than \$700 million.

It is important to talk about a track record. We should learn from the mistakes of this government, because you do not want to keep making them. One basic essential of good economic management is that major projects should have a business case. Did the government have a business case for that \$7 billion expenditure? Only on one project, and that I think is an indication of where the incompetence of this government is at its height.

There are other projects on which this government has wasted money but, once again, the government does not admit that there has been a mistake. So it is destined to make the same mistake again and expect Queenslanders to pay for it. Such is the case with the so-called smart driver's licence. More than \$110 million was spent on a project that, according to the former Premier of Queensland, Peter Beattie, was not originally supposed to cost anything. Then it was \$20 million and now it is \$112 million. But the licence does not do a fraction of the things that this government said that it would do originally.

Then there is the \$200,000 wasted on water restriction fridge magnets that were never distributed. But what about the money that was spent on those T-shirts that were supposed to advertise 'Buy Queensland made', except those T-shirts were made overseas? So the government ditched those. Once again, that waste is symbolic of the systemic issues of an arrogant government that has been there for too long, that says, 'No, there's no waste. We're not wasting money,' and it never admits where it has made mistakes. But once again, ordinary Queenslanders are expected to pay for the government's mistakes.

I have confidence that the people of Queensland and many of the fine public servants who are trying to do their jobs have the answers. They are quite adamant that the answer to cutting waste really should be about empowering the people and listening to their voice. I include in those people the good public servants who have been frustrated as they see their advice ignored about ways to deliver services more cost effectively to this state and to meet need.

Let me address some of the issues relating to housing. The federal government rolled out money for the building of public housing in this state. What did the government do? Yes, there were projects built, but they did not ask, 'Where is the need? What is the best way to meet that need?', which is not all the same. The government essentially had people lining up offering it blocks of land and projects that were ready to go. Then it said, 'Okay, we are going to build that project,' such as the one at Palm Cove. In that case the product that was delivered did not meet the local need. As I understand it, there were spinal injuries patients and there were people from an area of need who were told, 'This is the product for you.' It was a very nice product, but it was 20 kilometres away from local hospitals where those people's need was to be near service centres and where, quite understandably, their need was to be near public transport. But the government did not look at the need and the best, most cost-effective way to meet that need. The government took on projects that, in many regards, are indicative again that it was not addressing the real needs of the social housing mix.

Communities across Queensland are bearing the brunt of Labor's economic mismanagement and lack of planning. The cost-of-living increases have a financial impact on family tables, but they also have a social impact. Participation, emotional and mental wellbeing, community development and individual confidence are all casualties of skyrocketing bills and economic failures. The result is isolation and

increased need. Just as the government has failed to comprehend its economic mistakes, so, too, is it ignoring the impact on our communities, both in terms of the people in need and the people who provide the assistance.

The minister can boast as much as she likes about this budget, but the fact is that it is empty. It does not deliver for our community. It takes away from our community. In fact, an accurate measure of the minister's performance may well be the Service Delivery Statements itself. Just two service standards relating to community services remain in the budget. The minister is content to measure her performance and the department's addressing of the very real areas of need and vulnerability in the community on just two measures. What are those all important measures? The percentage of volunteers and the uptake of the Seniors Card. They are really central issues! The government does not even acknowledge the real heroes of volunteering—the community sector. In fact, the government does not even have actual statistics on how many people volunteer. For the record, the uptake of Seniors Cards is down. The community services budget has been reduced to nothing—no encouragement for a sector that is weighed down with cost-of-living increases, no assistance really for families, seniors and people in need.

Over recent years as electricity prices, water prices, car registration, petrol prices and food prices have risen, more and more people have been pushed to the brink of crisis and it is the non-government sector that has been there to provide assistance, counselling, vouchers and goods. The non-government sector has done that in an environment of ever-increasing need and ever-increasing bureaucracy and cost. The red tape that I was talking about before impacts not just on our business community; it impacts on the charitable sector as well. This government does not make it easy for the non-government sector to operate. It implements red tape and paperwork. It creates new rules and regulations without consultation or understanding of the impact of those new rules and regulations.

A non-government organisation has to deal with up to nine different government agencies, all with different rules and forms, just to receive simple funding. I say nine, but I have heard of examples of up to 14 different agencies that non-government organisations have to deal with. Non-government organisations are literally having to employ people just to deal with the ever-increasing amount of government paperwork and red tape. That is hardly the optimal engagement of funds that these organisations work so hard for as they try to help Queenslanders.

The cost of the operations of NGOs are increasing. Just like every household in Queensland, NGOs have operational costs and they pay today higher electricity, water and car costs. The wage increase was met with a limited and token response from the government and it seems that the government has certainly moved on from any need to offer any support to any organisations that are still struggling to keep afloat. This government's attitude to the community sector is, as the minister stated in the estimates hearing last year, that they should find efficiencies, that somehow these organisations are not already operating on a shoestring, that these organisations should stand by while this government wastes billions of dollars in failed IT projects, wasted water infrastructure, red tape cutting teams that oversee increases in bureaucracy, and similar stories throughout each department.

How difficult is it for these organisations, filled with people who genuinely want to make a difference to those in need, to jump through the hoops for money to be told to make more efficiencies at the same time as they see hurt inflicted on our communities. The non-government sector provides the front-line services. That sector knows it is needed in our community because it sees it every day. The non-government sector knows the increase in homelessness and hunger, the pressure on families and individuals and the isolation that plagues people who are restricted in their community participation. But this government is not listening to the non-government sector. It simply imposes more and more regulation and paperwork.

A reflection of this government's lack of understanding of the need in our community is the minister's attitude to homelessness and housing. Indeed, this morning the House was again subjected to the minister's pride that she was delivering fewer than 15 new houses in the next 12 months. This figure is in the same budget that shows that for every one of these houses built, presuming they are all built and built on time, there will be more than two new people added to the waiting list. There are already more than 30,000 people on that waiting list—more than 30,000 people waiting for long-term housing. The minister expects applause because she will provide housing for five per cent of the people on that list while that list grows by more than 10 per cent. That is this government's version of economic management. But then this government's management of housing has gone from appalling to horrendous, because it is not listening to the community, it is not listening to the NGOs and those who are trying to deliver wraparound care.

Whenever the waiting list gets too long it just changes the list; it wipes a few people off it. When there are floods it does not bother to include displaced people on any of the lists. Then there is a waiting list for housing in an area and it builds the project somewhere completely different for the area of need.

Just look at the implementation of the federal Nation Building Program. It seems that the government has this mindset: 'Why would we build facilities in areas of high need and homelessness if we can build them in areas with no actual waiting lists, no medical facilities for 20 kilometres and in a place

that is recommended against by the department's own staff?' That is actually seriously the way the minister has operated her department. As some of this minister's own staff said of the Palm Cove project, 'Unless advised otherwise, due to the lack of support from the area office and the absence of services nearby, I would not support progressing this project.' What was the minister's response? Well, the project was progressed. This budget has seen a slashing of housing funds. From \$733 million last year, funding for capital works and housing are plummeting to \$254 million—a 65 per cent cut, when housing needs are still at their most acute.

Other parts of the Capital Statement make interesting reading, such as the reannouncement of the Moranbah Youth Centre, a highlight of this budget. It was a highlight of last year's budget, too. But of the \$3 million promised last year just \$450,000 was spent, or just 15 per cent.

Another area that greatly affects the non-government sector is the regulation surrounding employment of those working with children—the blue card system. Increasingly there are accounts of people waiting too long for applications and renewals of their blue cards. No-one disputes the need for regulation in this area, but the Bligh Labor government's bureaucracy has almost doubled the amount of time Queensland's volunteers and NGO employees are waiting for their blue card. Processing delays, which have blown out the average time to between 17 and 29 days, are causing chaos for many of Queensland's community organisations. Prospective employees and volunteers wanting to undertake work around children are forced to wait or change plans because over the last 12 months the percentage of employment-screening applications processed in the 28-day time frame has plummeted from 87 per cent to just 30 per cent. The government blames new processes, legislative change, new databases, record numbers of applications and the impact of the floods, but the delays are hitting Queensland's community sector hard.

The biggest difficulty I have with this budget is that it leaves out so much. It ignores so much. Seniors are reduced to a line in the budget on the Seniors Card. There really is nothing for them in this budget, just as there really is nothing for families. There is nothing to address the very real need in our community, a need that has certainly been exacerbated, if not created, by this government's incompetence.

The LNP's focus is on empowering communities, working with the NGO sector to deliver housing and wraparound care and respecting that those at the front line delivering services deserve to be consulted and involved. We believe that it is about helping people in crisis but in particular also focusing on breaking the cycle of poverty. Instead, this government is tipping a record number of people into poverty. This government that claims it is the battler's friend is creating an awful lot of battlers through its policies, which have put such a high cost of living onto people who are now the new working poor. There is a situation in this state where those who are homeless are not always without a job. In fact, some have jobs and may be living in their car. They may have missed the mortgage payment. As we have heard, Queensland is leading Australia in regard to mortgage stress and foreclosures on mortgaged properties. These issues are a direct signal of the way this government has mismanaged the economy.

When I saw the minister with a pink hard hat on this morning I was thinking, 'That's the begging bowl they put out—a begging bowl for many Queenslanders who were once able to pay their way, until this government put its hand in their pocket and ripped out their last dollar.'