




Speech by
Ian Berry

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

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TREASURY (COST OF LIVING) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr BERRY** (Ipswich—LNP) (5.00 pm): I rise to speak to the Treasury (Cost of Living) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012, which contains significant measures by the LNP Newman government to start out on the journey of restoring Queenslanders' faith in government. Before I talk about the measures that I believe are important to Queenslanders, I thank the member for Gregory and the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice for their awe-inspiring rendition of what this government is doing for Queenslanders. Quite frankly, one of the factors which caused me to get involved in politics was the absolutely disgraceful legislation that was being passed for which everybody, particularly the legal profession, had to bear the cost. I am talking about PAMDA, sustainability declarations and so on—myriad green and red tape. It is a rocky road.

The interim report of the Queensland Commission of Audit, released on Friday, indicated that we have a \$4.9 billion operating deficit. That is a huge figure by anybody's standards. Everybody has heard about how our fiscal deficit is equal to that of New South Wales and Victoria. It is shameful how, in a state as prosperous as Queensland, hardworking Queenslanders now have to foot the bill and pay it back. This will be generational, because you cannot kill the sacred cow. The debt repayment has to be done slowly and deliberately. It is a huge debt to sustain.

This bill will operate on many fronts. It contains something for everybody—at least in the short term. The bill delivers on one of the promises the Premier made on the campaign trail. The sustainability declaration is a document which is purposeless in its outcome. The freezing of tariff 11 is a bold step, particularly after the delivery of the interim report on Friday. I will speak briefly about reinstating the homeowner's subsidy because the removal of that subsidy has distorted the property market. It caused a freezing up of business, of people wanting to invest, of young people going into homes because of supply and demand.

Carbon tax disclosure is the essence of what will be happening over the next 18 months or so. The federal government will be held accountable for the impact of the tax. When I was circulating throughout Ipswich in campaigning before the election I found that the topic that was most important to Ipswichians was the carbon tax.

A government member: 'Ipswichians'?

Mr BERRY: It is a new word; it has 'lan' on the end, you see. The carbon tax was the factor that influenced everybody the most. People did not consider whether I was running for council or for state or federal government; Labor voters came up and told me that what concerned them the most was the carbon tax. That is something that I think the federal government has lost sight of. I do not think it realises how important it is for Queenslanders and Australians, particularly people who live in Ipswich.

The member for Gregory mentioned the transport operators in his electorate. Nolan's transport is on the top 100 list. I do not know what they are going to do with the carbon tax—how their business can become more efficient in order to absorb the carbon tax. It is difficult to say. I have been to a lecture given

by BDO Kendalls about how this works. It is so complex. How small and medium businesses—leave aside the large ones—are going to cope with this I have no idea, but they are very concerned.

The sustainability declaration is a retrograde and ridiculous legislative measure. As a lawyer I can say that nobody had any idea what it was for. Its purpose was unknown. People did not know how to calculate the information upon which the—

Mr Bleijie: It was to appease the Greens.

Mr BERRY: There you go: the Greens again. The difficulty with that document is that you are trying to encourage people to declare how efficient is the home they are selling—not that I think many people place any relevance on whether in fact the light globes glow or whether you have to open the windows in summer or close the windows in winter or whether there is an air conditioner. What people are really concerned about—young people, battlers, anybody who wants to buy a home—is price and location. That has been known for quite some time. Yet we have this declaration that nobody knows about. People attempt to fill it out, but if they do not fill it out or do not fill it out correctly they can get a fine of up to \$2,000. What was the government thinking? People who are selling a home could be up for a \$2,000 fine. The sustainability declaration imposed upon vendors and vendors' agents the obligation to fill out the form. Of course, there are people out there who do not use agents. They have to sit down and do the best they can to try to measure how sustainable is the house that is to be placed on the market.

Queenslanders were dismayed that the Labor government abolished the homeowner subsidy. The Labor Party could have imposed a means test or put a cap on capital value. It could have dealt with this in lots of ways. If this was a philosophical decision and was not based on economics, it could have protected the battlers. They are the battlers who were the heartland of the Labor vote and who deserted Labor in droves. The reality is that those battlers have now voted for an LNP conservative government. It is incredible that they should do that. The reason they did that was that they lost confidence in the Labor Party and the direction in which it was going. For people trying to break into the housing market it was difficult enough to save for a deposit. People who were clever and prosperous would have a larger deposit and avoid paying mortgage insurance. People were doing those things at the time the subsidy was abolished, but not anymore. Once people have taken all of those steps and saved all of that money, they face the imposition of a further \$7,000 to save up for. It is very, very difficult indeed.

It was once the case that moving into a new home was exciting. To own a little bit of Queensland was a dream. It still is a dream for most of us. Abolishing the subsidy was a retrograde step. It distorted the market, simply for the reason that once the subsidy was abolished people withdrew. There were vendors wanting to sell but the demand for the house had reduced. But things have changed. Since the announcement by the government that this legislation would be introduced quickly, vibrancy has come back into the marketplace. People are now looking forward to having that saving again.

There is a certain buoyancy about the economy, certainly in Ipswich. There are people looking forward—looking forward to an LNP government getting on with business. The action that has been taken in the first 100 days is incredible. There has been an uplifting of people's enterprise and we are looking forward to getting on and hopefully extinguishing this debt, although that will obviously take many years, if not generations.

It is the battlers who have suffered the most. It is the men and women of Labor's heartland who have in fact deserted it in droves. But now we know why all of these things happened. It was not philosophically based; it was based on an economic landscape—a landscape where the Labor government had been mortgaging Queensland to the hilt and beyond. The level of Queensland's debt beggars belief. I do not know if members remember, but during the election campaign then Premier Bligh was asked what Queensland's debt was and she did not know. Either she knew and was not prepared to tell Queenslanders what they were entitled to know or she did not know. It is for Queenslanders to decide the credibility of the former Premier.

On election day I clearly remember speaking with a lady who had just walked past the federal member for Blair and avoided taking a handout from him—but we will talk about the carbon tax in more detail later. This lady said to me, 'Half of my income goes on accommodation. The other half I live on.' I said that the LNP could deliver for her a freeze on electricity tariff 11. Car registration did not really concern her. The subsidy did not really concern her. One thing she was really concerned about was the carbon tax. The fact is that we are going to save money for this lady and others in Queensland and they will know what the carbon tax is going to cost them so they can offset that against whatever payment they get from the federal government. That will give them a better idea as to how they will be voting in 18 months time. There were many stories like that throughout the campaign. It really is a huge concern to Queenslanders. She felt betrayed and she said that she had lost confidence in where the Labor Party was going. The reality of life is that it is refreshing to be a part of a government with a fresh and vibrant agenda.