




Speech By  
**Stephen Bennett**

**MEMBER FOR BURNETT**

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**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; REVENUE  
AMENDMENT AND TRADE AND INVESTMENT QUEENSLAND BILL**

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (4.41 pm): I am proud to rise and support this strong budget, and I am proud to add to the debate. I do remind myself often of what a great honour it is to represent the electorate of Burnett.

One of the great things about today is that in addition to it being Queensland Day, it is also my 26th anniversary. To my loving and understanding wife, I say happy anniversary.

Those on this side of the House take their role in the Legislative Assembly seriously and they demonstrate their loyalty to their constituents and their party. In speaking to this appropriation bill, I acknowledge the role that the Treasurer, cabinet and my colleagues have played in attempting to fairly deal with the debt legacy of those opposite. To ensure future prosperity, we need to manage our state's assets and wealth creation for all Queenslanders.

Natural disasters have caused significant impacts in my region and other regions. Flooding in 2010-11 and 2013 caused major loss and damage: 4,500 properties were damaged, 500 businesses were affected, and many state and local government roads and rail lines were badly affected. It is welcome that this budget allocates \$4.2 billion in 2013-14, increasing to \$9.2 billion, to be spent on Queensland's much needed recovery.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the disgraceful antics of the Australian Labor Party, which used my community as a pawn in their dark political games of disaster resilience funding. Never before had we had the opportunity to provide real resilience and sensible betterment investment. It was an insult to have \$40 million offered to Queensland, when we clearly needed over \$100 million. I hope and pray for a 14 September result that will see more common-sense economic and public finance allocated to a new approach to disaster recovery and preparedness.

We repeatedly see the incompetent Australian Labor Party fumbling the ball. I hear repeatedly from my constituents that they understand this government's obligation to make decisions to take action, to make our state's future better, and to make the electorate better. After years of neglect and poor representation, this budget delivers and puts Queensland first.

There was a huge impact on the agricultural sector, including sugar cane and fruit and vegetable production. This government is committed to the agriculture sector, strong policies, strong investment and recognition of the importance of a sustainable future. Local irrigators have been given the opportunity to take part in the local management review of Queensland's irrigation schemes. This is about giving organisations like the Bundaberg regional irrigators group an opportunity to demonstrate how these schemes will be transferred to viable long-term local entities.

I want to highlight the practical reforms that have been introduced to assist farming sectors in my electorate—practical reforms to Queensland's vegetation management framework, restoring balance to vegetation laws, marking the end of years of neglect in the agricultural sector. These new

vegetation management laws represent the most significant reforms affecting the rural sector in decades, and they mark the beginning of a new era of production in Queensland.

Landholders will save money with the introduction of self-assessable codes of routine vegetation management and ways of managing weeds and pests. This government will assist landowners affected by the flooding. Growers will be able to benefit from \$20 million on-farm productivity and riparian recovery programs to deliver practical on-ground solutions to repair damage and better prepare for future events.

The establishment of a stand-alone agriculture department has seen significant advancements. The investment in sugar industry research and development is further evidence of this government's commitment to the Bundaberg region's farming industry. Additional biosecurity officers, recovery officers and fisheries recovery officers in Bundaberg are just some of the many reforms implemented to assist the farming families in my electorate.

I am supportive of the investment in the agriculture sector, especially the funding for sugar cane industry research and development. The peak agricultural organisation Growcom has said that the state budget has included a number of positives for agriculture, reflecting the LNP's commitment to the industry—one of the four pillars of our economy.

I note and welcome the Queensland Farmers Federation comments on the budget providing the potential to create positive outcomes for the farming sector: the Queensland agriculture strategy which includes a drought relief package; \$8 million over four years for healthy waterways; increased funding for coal seam gas regulation; funding over five years for initiatives that will protect the Great Barrier Reef; and \$8.5 million over four years toward a community service obligation for rural irrigation.

Rising input costs such as electricity and water remain some of the biggest challenges facing our state's farmers, and I look forward to working toward a suitable sustainable outcome.

I mention again the desperate need in my electorate to flood proof roads, especially the Fingerboard Road and the Essenden Bridge. We have lobbied hard on these issues, and I express my disappointment that there is no money in this budget to be allocated to the design and documentation of those essential roadworks.

I certainly have some great news to promote in the electorate, including the \$15,000 grant for first home owners and the boost to the construction sector. Funding for the Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services portfolio will increase to \$2.8 billion and, importantly, the budget delivers to some of Queensland's most vulnerable people, including those who have experienced domestic violence, elder abuse, children in foster care, and people with disabilities.

Wide Bay Hospital and Health Service has received a boost of \$8.3 million, around two per cent of its \$450 million budget. A total of \$2.8 million has been allocated to build long awaited dental centres in Bundaberg and Hervey Bay. Work is to start this coming year. Further good news will be the \$97 million boost over four years for the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme, plus \$325,000 to build a facility to provide autism early intervention services in Bundaberg.

On top of these big wins for the region, there is \$1.5 million for the replacement of the ambulance station, plus \$14 million for disability service grants. A separate amount of \$2 million will provide minor capital health projects and acquisitions, and \$2.14 million will go towards health technology repairs and replacements. A further \$8.3 million will increase Bundaberg and Wide Bay Hospital and Health Service's budget, empower the local board to tackle waiting lists, and enable infrastructure projects such as the oral health facility and autism early intervention service facility to go ahead.

In other good news, \$4.74 million is to be spent on the Isis Highway between Bundaberg and Childers and there is an increase in funding of \$5 million for the Bruce Highway with specific funding between Maryborough and Childers. Of course, we all talk about the \$160,000 available to our schools to fix up the backlog of maintenance. It is truly a great initiative and it is welcomed.

With reference to an electoral region that has a large span of disadvantage, I welcome the targeted measures provided for Queenslanders with low incomes and special needs. The concessional statement highlights the broader subsidies that are in place to improve assessability and affordability of services to all Queenslanders. The value of concessions in the Newman government's 2013-14 Concessions Statement is estimated at over \$5.1 billion. This is approximately four times the value of the concessions identified by Labor in its last budget.

In addition, the concessions continue. I will not read them out. We have all read them and we are very excited by them, but I do want to talk about the additional \$130 million for the freeze on car registration; \$900 million to reinstate the principal place of residence concessional rate for stamp duty; and, of course, \$63 million for the tariff 11 freeze.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge investment in tourism and sport. Both were badly neglected by the previous local member but are now being managed and resourced for the benefit of my electorate. Country racing and national parks receive special treatment, and I thank the ministers.

The two aspects of the budget which give me the greatest pleasure and pride in our government are the record investments in health and schools. After years of neglect and black political days, there is now progress. There is now improvement, and I want to thank the local hospital board, in particular the previous chair, Gary Kirk, whose leadership drove the reforms needed. The Wide Bay Hospital and Health Service's chief executive officer, Adrian Pennington, is a strong and determined manager who delivers great and unprecedented results. The men and women who moulded these reforms need to be congratulated. I congratulate the Bundaberg Base Hospital.

The constituents who have seen record improvements in waiting times for surgery and treatment at emergency departments also say thank you to everyone involved. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the leadership team of the cabinet for its continued tremendous support to the region after the disaster events of January-February 2013. I could not have asked for more, and I am very, very pleased to be a member of this government.

This is an excellent budget for Queensland. It is also the Treasurer's second budget. I congratulate him and his ministerial and departmental staff on what has been a well delivered and well received budget. I commend the bill to the House.