




Speech By
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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Asset Sales

 **Mr PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (11.33 am): When announcing his so-called ‘asset sales listening tour’ yesterday on ABC Radio, the Treasurer said, ‘We come to this saying, “Here is the problem, perhaps Queenslanders should listen to what we’re saying”.’ This sounds a lot like the Treasurer is going to embark on an asset sales lecture tour rather than a listening tour. According to the Treasurer, the problem is not that he is not listening. Apparently the problem is that we are not listening to his hollow justifications for asset sales. Why else would the Treasurer task public relations firm Phillips Group, which charges a \$20,000 monthly retainer, with the objective of convincing Queenslanders and his own colleagues to support asset sales? It is clear that, when it comes to asset sales, the Treasurer is not listening just as he fails to listen to the ABS on employment or to the Auditor-General on the money lost from the Treasurer’s last round of asset sales. If the Treasurer truly was listening he would not have global investment bankers beginning the sales process he says is not currently occurring. Queenslanders need to know that, while the LNP says they are listening, the wolves of Wall Street are getting paid millions of taxpayer dollars to start flogging off their state assets.

In response to both questions on notice and a right to information request, the Treasurer has refused to detail how many millions of taxpayer dollars are going to the likes of JP Morgan and Rothschild to prepare assets for sale. According to the Newman government, this information is secret because it is under active cabinet consideration. The Newman government is not waiting to hear what Queenslanders have to say about asset sales. They already know the answer. The Treasurer need only ask the member for Ipswich West. People do not want to see the sale of our most profitable ports and essential public utilities. Let us now look at the claims to which the Treasurer thinks Queenslanders are not listening.

The Treasurer claims that Labor left him with a black cloud of \$80 billion in debt and interest costs of \$450,000 per hour based on ‘Labor debt’. These statements are untrue, just as the Treasurer’s claims of a ‘debt crisis’ and \$100 billion in debt were found to be untrue in 2012. The Treasurer’s \$450,000 interest figure is not based on Labor debt; it is based on total state debt after the Newman government increased debt by \$14.6 billion. Labor left gross debt of \$62 billion with nearly half of this self-sustaining debt held by government owned corporations. The total state debt reflected \$60 billion in infrastructure investment over a four-year period, which kept Queensland out of recession during the GFC. Excluding the debt held by GOCs, Labor left Queensland with no net debt. The Treasurer certainly will not tell us that the state has total revenue of nearly \$6 million per hour. When we look at this interest bill as a percentage of the state’s income, it is under eight per cent. Most Queenslanders would be pretty happy if only eight per cent of their income was going towards their mortgage and credit card bills. When GOCs are excluded from this calculation, debt interest makes up less than five per cent of the state’s income. To say that this state is going broke is simply rubbish, and it is a completely irresponsible thing for a Treasurer to say. I doubt we will hear the Premier saying that we are going broke while he is on his overseas trade mission. As usual, he says

one thing overseas and says another to Queenslanders. While the Treasurer insists we are going broke, he also says that if assets are sold the money can be used to build new football stadiums, in a desperate bid to win votes, rather than the roads, hospitals and schools that we all need.

Queenslanders are not listening to this Treasurer for good reason. The last asset sale that this Treasurer made, with no election mandate, was a financial catastrophe. Seven CBD office buildings were sold for \$237 million less than their value and then they were rented back off private sector investors at a cost of \$1.2 billion. The Auditor-General has described these ongoing rental costs as 'risks to operating sustainability' of the state's finances. I am not sure what chance Queenslanders will have of lending the Treasurer's ear when he will not even listen to the Auditor-General.

The Treasurer is also not listening to the ABS on employment. When it came to light that Queensland had the highest increase in underemployment over the last year, the Treasurer's response was to dispute the figures. The Treasurer claims that he knows better than both the Auditor-General and the ABS. It is little wonder that he is refusing to listen to the polling in his own electorate, to the thumping result in Redcliffe and to the voices of everyday Queenslanders when they say that they do not want their most profitable ports and essential public assets sold. The Treasurer need only ask his LNP colleagues what their constituents are telling them about asset sales—the same colleagues who rolled him in his bid for a full scale sell-off of Ergon, Energex and Powerlink last year. The Treasurer has not even listened to his own colleagues, given that his stable of global investment bankers is also looking at ways in which the private sector can take an 'equity interest' or ownership take in huge chunks of those electricity businesses.

The only way Queenslanders can make this government listen is by sending them a message at the ballot box that their most profitable ports and essential public assets are not for sale. The message at the next election is a simple one: the LNP will sell your assets; Labor will not. History—

Government members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr Robinson): Order! Members! The House will come to order. The Manager of Opposition Business has the call.

Government members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members! The member for Mulgrave has the call.

Mr PITT: History is a powerful teacher. On this side of the House we listen to Queenslanders and we learn.

Government members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members!

Mr PITT: Queenslanders will be able to cast their vote with that in mind.