




Speech By
Ray Stevens

MEMBER FOR MERMAID BEACH

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**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; REVENUE
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr STEVENS** (Mermaid Beach—LNP) (12.04 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill 2014 and the Appropriation Bill 2014 that are being debated today in the House. I would like to congratulate the Treasurer on all of his hard work on the 2014-15 budget, which is a budget that is in the best interests of Queenslanders. I know that, with the added pressure from the federal government's budget handed down recently, he has delivered a strong budget for sustained economic growth, debt reduction and a brighter future.

We are moving into a steady growth period, with economic growth forecast to be three per cent in 2014-15. This is due to the astute fiscal management of the Treasurer, who has managed the state's finances under the very difficult circumstances left to us by the former Labor government. Some of those opposite who were involved with that debt are still in this House today. Debt and deficit is their legacy, and we have to fix the mess in which the former Labor government left Queensland. This is a budget for all Queenslanders, because in the end we will all reap the rewards and benefits of the good economic management that we have seen from the Treasurer since we have come to office. Although this year we have a deficit of \$2.27 billion—due to the federal reduction in revenue to the states and a reduction in coal royalties—the budget will be returned to surplus in 2015-16.

The Treasurer's Strong Choices listening tour has been one of the best community consultation processes that I have ever seen carried out in Queensland. This is the first time that a Treasurer has made himself available so widely and directly to the Queensland community. The Treasurer has given Queenslanders a choice on how they want to fix the budget, and I certainly take my hat off to the very hard work that he has done over this period. The choices given to the Queensland community of selling assets, raising taxes or reducing services are distinct choices on which individually we all have a different opinion and which will impact on the state's bottom line in different ways. As with everything, there was a difference of opinion, but with over 50,000 people offering their opinions through the Strong Choices survey, it was a major consideration in tackling the \$80 billion of state debt. Some survey participants wanted higher taxes for the gaming and mining industry—probably because they were not involved—rather than selling off state assets; others did not want assets to be sold at all. The 15 May 2014 survey conducted amongst its members by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Queensland determined that 61 per cent of small business owners preferred selling assets over higher taxes. All of these opinions have been taken into consideration, and I applaud the Treasurer for the consultative process he has undertaken with the Queensland public.

Now the government's draft plan of action has been released, which is the Strongest and Smartest Choice plan. The Premier is in agreement with giving Queenslanders a voice and has explained that it is about exchanging and recycling old assets for new assets, but the issue of selling some of the assets will not happen until after the election next March. As we know, the Premier has a stronger plan for a brighter future for each and every Queenslanders and is personally determined to keep Queensland the leading state in this wonderful nation. The growing of the four-pillar economy is

of the highest priority for the LNP government; lowering the cost of living for families to help their own family budgets; delivering better infrastructure and better planning; introducing the fabulous party house legislation—I am only referring to it, Mr Deputy Speaker—into the House this week; revitalising front-line services for families; and restoring accountability in government.

The four pillars of tourism, agriculture, resources and construction are the focus of the LNP government, and I know for a fact that tourism on the Gold Coast is having a resurgence beyond our wildest dreams thanks to this government's effective tourism policies and the positive change in business confidence. The Gold Coast is all about confidence, and we are seeing record tourism numbers. I congratulate the tourism minister on a wonderful job in terms of not only representing the Gold Coast and tourism but right across the state. Congratulations, Minister!

The spotlight on agriculture to help our hardworking farmers as they feed Queensland and provide a sustainable, long-term, high-quality food supply to our tables has been very much the focus of the government. The government will look after our farmers to the tune of \$62 million in drought relief. Our resources industry is steady and, managed properly, our important resources can be available well into the future and our construction industry means jobs, jobs, jobs for the future, and that is a great thing for our Queensland economy. Lowering the cost of living for families is a fundamental focus of the LNP government because, by doing this, Queensland families will have more money in their pockets to spend in our economy. We are delivering better infrastructure with roads, schools and hospitals and with exciting new developments such as Queen's Wharf—a six-star multibillion-dollar resort development—along with proposed casinos in Cairns and the Gold Coast. These are great examples that will secure Queensland as an international tourism destination. The announcement by the Treasurer of further funding for child protection shows that we are revitalising front-line services for families. Over \$400 million will go into child protection over a five-year plan to improve front-line child services, a move which we all applaud. I congratulate the Treasurer and the Minister for Child Safety on their commitment to protect the vulnerable in our community—our children.

It would be remiss of me if I did not mention the commitment this LNP government has to restoring accountability in government, and this is being driven and helped along with the Premier's open data priority. As Assistant Minister to the Premier on e-government, we have been working hard at making the Queensland government the most open and accountable government in the world. Our open data advisory group, the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and departmental officers and myself have been working hard on having as much government data on our open data website as possible. This shows the world that the Queensland government is open, accountable and excited to have its data freely available to business, community organisations, non-government organisations, all levels of government, the academic community and the public. This is a great collaboration between state and local governments given the open data group has expanded and included a local government representative from the Brisbane City Council, Ms Cara Walsh, which gives us a great grassroots local government perspective. I want to congratulate the Premier on his visionary and enthusiastic approach to this project and giving it the highest of priorities so we are able to deliver on this very important project which is now a worldwide phenomenon.

We know that Queensland's economic management has changed for the better since we have come to office, but due to Labor's drunken sailor spending and budget mismanagement we are, of course, left with a massive debt. This means that Queensland's accumulated debt is at \$80 billion, resulting in interest payments of \$4 billion a year. This is why the Treasurer has focused on restoring our budget to surplus, which will be achieved in 2015-16.

On the local front, in Mermaid Beach as part of the budget the LNP has proposed a \$44.5 million funding injection for Australia's most comprehensive action plan to eradicate alcohol and drug related violence. This is particularly important to our Broadbeach precinct, which I share with the member for Surfers Paradise and which so many residents utilise.

A government member interjected.

Mr STEVENS: Absolutely. The state budget includes \$29.1 million in new funding and \$15.4 million from existing departmental resources to support the Safe Night Out Strategy over the next four years. There will be additional liquor licensing inspectors, the establishment of safe night out precincts, support services, awareness campaigns and a trial of sober safe centres. Locally based safe night out precinct boards will be able to apply for grants from an \$8 million funding pool for projects that best meet their local needs, whether that be for improved lighting, more toilets, CCTV cameras or extra support services. By implementing the Safe Night Out Strategy, the LNP government will be changing the culture, changing the law and changing the environment. We will also be increasing police powers and licensing and penalties, including mandatory community service orders and compulsory alcohol and drug counselling. The Minister for Police has allocated 267 new

police, and I take this opportunity to congratulate the minister on the great job he is doing on keeping our streets safe and I am sure a good number of those new police will be allocated to the Gold Coast region.

I absolutely want to take this opportunity to inform the House of how the criminal bikie gang laws have worked enormously well in Mermaid Beach and on the Gold Coast and how successful the laws the Attorney-General has introduced have been in eradicating these terrible groups within our areas. Mermaid Beach is totally changing as the criminal gangs have moved out and the suburb has become a great tourism destination with great little coffee shops, surf shops and art galleries. In conclusion, I want to personally congratulate the Treasurer, the Premier and the cabinet for their collaborative hard work on the budget and in particular the Treasurer, who understands the current economic position of the state's finances and who understands the needs of the electorate and who has found the right balance to see a surplus in 2015-16. This is a great budget for a great state and is part of the LNP's strong plan for a brighter future.