




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

Utilities, Science and Innovation Committee, Report

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (11.25 pm): I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the report of the Utilities, Science and Innovation committee. Before I commence I acknowledge my fellow committee members and the hardworking parliamentary staff who support our committee. The estimates hearings provided an opportunity for Queenslanders to hear firsthand the detail behind the 2015-16 budget—a time for this government to provide clarity and certainty on the way forward, to demonstrate prudent expenditure of public money and to explain its plan for economic development and job creation. Instead, I saw indecision, a lack of accountability and no commitment to the big infrastructure projects that we need to kickstart our economy and create those much needed jobs. I will give an example.

During the estimates hearings I asked the minister when the initiatives announced in the government's Advance Queensland plan would be implemented. The minister responded that the plan had not yet commenced as the government was establishing an implementation committee to oversee delivery of this plan. Given that this is meant to be the flagship initiative for this government, the minister was unable to answer questions in detail on the Advance Queensland initiative, particularly in relation to the funding that will be directed to the administration of this program. It seems incomprehensible that the central platform of the government as announced as part of its budget remains stalled at a time when unemployment is rising.

I have spoken on many occasions in this chamber about the desperate need for job creation in electorates such as Burdekin and am disappointed that there is nothing in this year's budget to give the people of the Burdekin hope in terms of job creation. Where was the government's commitment to priority road projects such as Stuart Drive in Townsville and the Haughton River Bridge at Giru, a priority project for the Bruce Highway? Where was the commitment to water projects such as the Urannah Dam, Elliot Main Channel and raising the Burdekin Falls Dam? We have tens of thousands of hectares of land available for farming around Collinsville between Home Hill and Bowen that cannot be developed because of a lack of water, yet the government seems hell-bent on developing the gulf, where there is no infrastructure and where costs are prohibitive. Where was the commitment to the development of the Townsville state development area, an area seen as vitally important for the economic development of North Queensland?

For a government with a so-called focus on jobs, there was nothing in the responses by the ministers at the estimates hearings to engender any confidence going forward that we will see these much needed projects progress. Already today we have heard how important the development of the Galilee Basin is to Queensland's economy. The thousands of jobs involved in the construction of the Carmichael Mine and the associated railway line would go a long way to solving Queensland's job crisis.

Yet all we have seen is more procrastination from a government with no clear vision on how these projects will proceed.

The escalating costs of electricity are well known and, whilst I am pleased to hear that the review into agricultural tariffs will take place, I urge the minister to fast-track this review as our farmers cannot sustain paying the skyrocketing electricity prices they continually pay for irrigation. Agriculture is the cornerstone of our economy and our farmers are among the best in the world, yet they continue to be hammered by rising utility costs, forcing many of them to leave the industry.

Finally, I express my concern at the number of reviews being undertaken within the Housing and Public Works portfolio, particularly in terms of the temporary absence policy and the three-strikes policy. I have experienced firsthand the issues associated with problem tenants and can unequivocally state that the overwhelming majority of my constituents support the three-strikes policy and the relevant protection it affords to other members of the community. There are thousands of people on the waiting list for public housing and we should not have to put up with errant tenants who abuse the privilege of that public housing.