




Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; DUTIES AND
OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (5.43 pm): The Treasurer promised that the budget would be all about creating jobs for regional Queensland, but one can only say that it is a complete disappointment with a lack of job initiatives for Central and Western Queensland while taxes and charges are forecast to increase at twice the rate of inflation. Transport links create jobs. Increased delivery services create jobs. Infrastructure creates jobs. This budget will deliver the lowest infrastructure spend in Queensland's history. It actually slashes infrastructure spending by \$2.3 billion when compared to the LNP, and all Gregory gets is a bit of a crumb. Take road spending, for example. We are getting an extra passing lane on the Capricorn Highway near Duaringa, and we are getting a bit of funding for the Gregory Highway and the Landsborough Highway.

The seat of Gregory is a wealth-creating region. In the central highlands, we have mining, beef, cotton, grain, horticulture—the list goes on. In the west, we have beef and wool production and outback tourism. All these industries pay their fair share in taxes and charges which ends up in the state government's revenue column. Both the Isaac and the Central Highlands shires cover the Bowen Basin mining industry. The bulk of the state's mining royalties come from that region, yet the Treasurer has largely ignored the region. The region punches well above its weight, yet the Treasurer and the Labor government have ignored it yet again.

The central and south-west, despite years of drought, continue to provide wealth for the state's coffers. Yes, I welcome the drought funding, but this funding was started under the LNP government. In fact, over \$100 million in drought funding was allocated when the member for Clayfield, Tim Nicholls, was Treasurer. He did not blink an eye when we needed that funding for the drought. It was the former agricultural minister, John McVeigh, the member for Clayfield and now opposition leader, and also the member for Callide, the former deputy premier, who did not blink an eye when it came time to give that money out. They were happy to do that constantly.

We have had some rain out west, but I can assure the House that the drought is far from over. If someone asks members in the House whether the drought is over, I would like everyone in the House to please say that it is not over. The rain will help some through the winter, but members have to remember that this is winter and the heat units and the pasture growth will be limited. All we have is an opportunity for a bit of herbage growth out there, and we have filled some dams and creeks with water. It has been very welcome, but we still have properties out in the west that have missed out. If members are talking to people, especially here in the south-east, please tell them that the drought is not over.

Agriculture is the unsung hero, as we experience a massive mining downturn in regional Queensland, so it is imperative that the state government invest in it. The LNP valued agriculture as a pillar of our economy. We invested in infrastructure and research and development but, most

importantly, we re-established a department focused on agriculture. We actually established a department of agriculture for agriculture. Who would have thought that! We have a department for agriculture.

I am a little amused that one of the big announcements from the budget for agriculture is that they are now going to set up an Office of Rural Affairs in the department of agriculture. We are going to have an Office of Rural Affairs in the department of agriculture. What will that tell us—that it is rural? We know that agriculture is rural. We will have another office in an office of agriculture talking about rural affairs. That is fantastic! Why do we need an Office of Rural Affairs in a department of agriculture? Agriculture is rural. News flash—agriculture is rural, people. We will have more bureaucracy in Ann Street, Brisbane. That is what we want! More bureaucracy in Ann Street. More money will be wasted on city based positions for agriculture. What about employing agronomists, entomologists or stock inspectors in the region? Why don't we do that? Let us employ some people in agriculture in agriculture, not in Brisbane based positions. Now we have \$7 million going towards the tree police. We have more obstacles in front of agriculture. That is not how we need to invest in agriculture.

I will now move to something that I am very passionate about and that I talk about a lot in this House—that is, road funding. It is very important to the seat of Gregory and it is seriously lacking in the seat of Gregory. We need the sealing of the major north-south links of the Springsure-Tambo road. We also need the sealing of the Clermont-Alpha-Tambo road. That would improve the competitiveness of freight and agricultural products using the road. It would expand the region's drive tourism product, helping the economies in these towns. It would also improve Queensland's wet weather resilience. With construction work for two council road crews, it would truly deliver jobs for the region.

I am bitterly disappointed—very bitterly disappointed—that no money was committed to the construction of Rookwood Weir in Central Queensland just in the seat of Gregory near Gogango. Water is prosperity. We needed the Palaszczuk Labor government to commit to matching the federal funding of \$130 million for this to proceed. It would create 2,100 new permanent jobs and \$1 billion in new agricultural product for Central Queensland. That is how to create jobs. With an economic multiplier of three for services and transport and logistics, it would lift Central Queensland into the category of an agricultural powerhouse at a time when we have never had better access to foreign markets.

The effect would be felt right across Central Queensland and right out to the west, but it seems the Labor government forgot Central Queensland. They jump on a plane in Brisbane and fly straight over Central Queensland. They fly straight over the top of us and head to Townsville—maybe they give us a wave on the way through. We have lost 20,000 jobs since the mining downturn and we have lost 6,000 jobs in the outback, but all we get are some crumbs here and there.

One of the other passions I have is small business in regional Queensland, and it has been shabbily treated. There are shameful rates of unemployment in regional Queensland. Collectively, small business is a major employer right across the regions and right across the seat of Gregory. Small business is struggling with government and other charges such as payroll tax, vehicle registration, inflated fuel charges and electricity bills which are really starting to hurt small business in regional Queensland. It is the state government imposed burdens that are killing small business from the Central Highlands to the west. This budget has state government taxes and charges rising at twice the rate of inflation. The burden on small business will get worse, not better.

Small business in the west has suffered four years of drought. Towns in Western Queensland could become virtual ghost towns if the plight of drought-affected small businesses continues to be ignored. Drought-affected primary producers receive state government assistance, including access to loans, freight and electricity subsidies from the Queensland government, which needs to continue; I fully support that. We need to continue that. By contrast, small businesses in Western Queensland that are suffering in those drought-affected areas receive absolutely nothing. Their incomes dried up when their customers' incomes disappeared due to the drought, yet somehow they are expected just to get through by themselves. I can tell honourable members that this is impossible in a drought of this length—four years and probably going into our fifth year without a wet season. Small businesses are closing right across the bush. The situation is dire as we end our fifth 'wet' season with virtually no rain in that wet season.

The plight of small business has a major knock-on effect for the people of Western Queensland. I believe it has directly contributed to the shameful rate of youth unemployment in outback Queensland, which is currently sitting at 33 per cent, as the shops and services have to let their staff go. The number increased by 13,000 last year alone. We urgently need to extend the Queensland government drought assistance on a regional basis rather than just on an industry-specific basis. We need to extend these drought assistance programs to small business. This would allow small business in drought-declared regions to access the same assistance as primary producers in terms of concessional loans, freight and electricity subsidies.

I am talking about small businesses that are not going through their first or second year of drought; they are going through their fourth year of drought. What do they do when they go through drought? They carry credit for drought-affected primary producers across this state. They carry a whole lot of credit. Underwriting their survival also underwrites continuing employment and quality of life during the drought and the social capacity to recover when the drought breaks. Our small businesses are the heart and soul of the district. They are generous sponsors of local causes and they were the first to extend credit to their drought-affected customers when the drought began to bite. After being drought declared for four years, their need is desperate now more than ever and we need to help them.

This budget is lacking infrastructure and spending in the regions that creates the money to create the jobs. Yet it has been made worse by taking money from the Public Service super funds and the GOC dividends as we head down a track of more debt and no sign of our credit rating improving.