




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

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MOTION: NATURAL DISASTER RELIEF AND RECOVERY ARRANGEMENTS

 **Mr NICHOLLS** (Clayfield—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (12.50 pm): How short their memories are. If ever there were someone for whom the epitaph ‘pot, kettle, black’ applied, it would be the Deputy Premier and the speech she has just given today because it was only a matter of four years ago that her great friend Wayne Swan, the treasurer of Australia at the time, denied the state of Queensland \$725 million in disaster payments—\$725 million that the state of Queensland was not receiving because Wayne Swan—how many times did he promise a budget surplus again? I forget. How many budget surpluses did he deliver? I remember that one—zero. He started playing games to try to get his budget back into surplus. You cannot get your budget back into surplus when you cannot control your spending, when you cannot control all your lefty mates who want to hand out money left, right and centre to every union fiddle and dodge that comes along.

We remember clearly in 2012 Wayne Swan refusing to pay the \$725 million that Queensland was owed. Did we go chasing that money? You bet we did. We went chasing that money because Wayne Swan also imposed a tax on all of Australia—a flood recovery tax that we all had to pay. Not only was he getting the money in; but in typical Labor fashion he was not handing it out. Do you know why he was not handing it out at the time? Because the Labor government had not submitted claims that were properly audited and costed. They found that they were not being properly audited. All the way up to the floods in 2011 the claims that were being made and submitted by the department of local government and planning for disaster recovery reimbursement were not properly audited.

There was no pre-disaster assessment of the assets. There was no post-disaster assessment of the assets. There was simply a claim made. It was the same method they used to build the Western Corridor Recycled Water Scheme. It was the same method they used to build the Tugun desalination plant. It was the same method they used to build the *Sunlander* train that ended up costing \$200 million. It was the same method that delivered trains without seats, trains with air conditioning that would not fit in tunnels, dams without pipes, pipes without dams and deficits mounting up over the forward years.

Mr Minnikin: Hopeless.

Mr NICHOLLS: It was that method that even Wayne Swan realised was hopeless—absolutely hopeless. It led—

Ms Trad: Fight for it now. You fought before; fight for it now.

Mr NICHOLLS: I fought for it four years ago. Do you know why? I went back to *Hansard* and looked up when I fought for it. I noticed the complete absence of fighting for it by the then deputy premier who was sitting in this spot for those 2½ years. I remember speaking about fighting for the money that Queensland deserves from the levy that Wayne Swan introduced. I remember pointing out that we had gone in with the Queensland reconstruction task force and re-audited all of those figures and we had found out where the fiddles and the dodges were. We resubmitted those claims—to the absolute best capacity of the Queensland Audit Office and the Queensland Reconstruction Authority—to Canberra and Wayne Swan still refused to accept those claims.

As a result of that, the federal government then set up a supervisory panel which included John Fahey, who also checked the claims that were being put in there. I remember having arguments with John Fahey at the time about dealing with the payments that were made at the time. I continued that fight for the \$725 million when Joe Hockey was the federal treasurer as well. It does not matter who it was in Canberra who was not paying the money. We on this side were standing up for that \$725 million to be made available here in Queensland without a shadow of a doubt.

Let us not get too caught up in the Deputy Premier's high and mighty statements about families not being able to rebuild their lives and communities not being able to rebuild those lives, because the obligation on the Commonwealth is not to fund it but to reimburse the expense of the states. All this is is a cover for the fact that this state government cannot manage its finances. We did not get the \$725 million from the federal government, but we still covered every claim that was made. We still spent all the money that was necessary.

The member for Indooroopilly still spent the money on making sure that the Toowoomba range crossing was repaired. It took a year and a half to get that done. We still spent the money on making sure that the water pump and pumping system in the member for Callide's electorate was repaired and the citrus farmers were able to access the funds. We still spent the money in Bundaberg on making sure that the recovery from ex-Tropical Cyclone Oswald was made available to them. We spent that money because we were good financial managers. We did not put the people of Queensland last and politics first as this Labor government does. We put the people of Queensland first and politics last so we could get on with the job of rebuilding this great state at the time that it was going on.

No-one should be under any misapprehension as to what it is that the government are doing. They are covering up for their own fiscal ineptitude. They are covering up for the fact that debt continues to spiral to \$80 billion. They are covering up for the fact that their operating surplus is wafer-thin because they have not been able to manage their expenses. They are succumbing to every fiddle and dodge that their union mates are putting on them. Waste and inefficiency are creeping back into government in Queensland. As a result of that, when you look at their midyear economic forecast—and the shadow Treasurer will deal with more of this in greater detail—you see that that \$1.1 billion, which will still be paid, is used to support the surplus in the budget and their operating surplus in the budget.

That is why, when you look at the operating surplus for the state of Queensland, it was not the right measure to use because it is exactly subject to the ups and downs of those payments. We focused on the fiscal surplus because that was the recommendation of the Queensland Treasury—the net new borrowing requirement. That was the requirement, not fluffing around with an operating surplus where they can add money in and pull money out, where they can raid the GOCs, where they can force them to increase debt, where they can force them to pay 100 per cent of dividends—not that sort of budget but a proper fiscal operating surplus which shows how much you are spending not just on recurrent but also on capital outlays because that is the true measure of the wealth of the state.

The cat has been belled. It was belled on Saturday in the *Courier-Mail*. Now, in response, the Deputy Premier has jumped along and said, 'Struth, we have to defend ourselves here and move this motion.' This has not been about protecting the interests of Queensland. This has been about protecting the interests of the Labor Party. It is like their move Thursday week ago when they came in here to protect their own interests by changing the voting process. It is all about protecting their interests.

The reality is that the funds will be paid. The funds are not not going to be paid. They will be paid after a proper audit process has been followed and gone through. It should be the case that the state of Queensland fights for those moneys if they were not being paid, but they are going to be paid. They are not going to pay them on the basis of claims that are untested, as they should not. No-one would support that. The reason I know that is that I signed the document. I signed the NDRRA agreement.

Ms Trad interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Farmer): Order! I ask the Deputy Premier to cease interjecting please.

Mr NICHOLLS: People do know I like the Deputy Premier, don't they, Madam Deputy Speaker? She is engaging in a good debate. In this circumstance, I signed the NDRRA agreement that was put in place in 2013. I negotiated that with Joe Ludwig, who was a senator for Queensland at the time. He was inherently a decent person in doing it, but he was under the pump because the ANAO had told him that Queensland claims were not up to scratch. He went through the Senate's process and did not like it as well. This is a political construct, not a genuine concern for the people of Queensland.