




Speech By  
**Lachlan Millar**

**MEMBER FOR GREGORY**

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Record of Proceedings, 16 June 2017

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

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (12.42 pm): All I can say is that I am bitterly disappointed with the Palaszczuk Labor government's 2017-18 budget. For the first time ever in Queensland history, the state debt will top \$80 billion. That is almost \$16,000 for every man, woman and child in 2020 thanks to the mismanagement of the state's finances by the Labor Party. This week's budget confirms that the Palaszczuk Labor government has no real plans for regional Queensland. It proves that it is a government for Brisbane, not a government for all of Queensland. Regional Queensland has taken a big hit in the 2017-18 budget with \$192 million in infrastructure funding ripped out of the outback. At a time when the outback is going through five years of drought and looking down the barrel of another failed wet season, the government has ripped out \$192 million in infrastructure funding from the outback. Some \$35 million has been cut from the Central Queensland infrastructure funding program and \$400 million slashed from the state's road funding program.

Members opposite have siphoned off our regional infrastructure funding to pay for their signature project in Brisbane—the \$5.4 billion Cross River Rail! Imagine what \$5.4 billion would do in regional Queensland. With that kind of money, we could complete the GABSI works program, pest proof the entire central west, build the inland port at Yamala and Rookwood Weir, unlock the potential of our agriculture and tourism industries and pave and seal many of our state controlled roads which have been left largely untouched for two decades under Labor. While I welcome the \$4 million on the table for the continuation of the Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative, it is not good enough. For years landholders and contractors have been battling the stop-start works program because of the indecisiveness of the Labor Party, and again they have no certainty.

**Mr Power** interjected.

**Mr MILLAR:** The federal government committed \$8 million in May this year for the continuation of the GABSI works program until 2018-19.

**Mr Power** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Crawford): Order! Member for Logan, your interjections are not being taken. I ask you to stop or you will be warned under 253A.

**Mr MILLAR:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Historically projects have been funded on an equal basis between landholders and the state and federal governments. For this to continue, and with the capping and piping works still to be completed on 160 free-flowing bores and 5,500 kilometres of open bore drains, \$4 million from the Palaszczuk Labor government is not going to cut it.

I am also disappointed that this government has virtually turned a blind eye to the needs of the agriculture sector in the electorate of Gregory. After five consecutive years of drought, the communities of Western Queensland are on their knees. Road funding and cluster fencing projects are exactly what these communities need. They provide jobs and stabilise the local economy. We have a youth

unemployment rate in some parts of outback Queensland as high as 48 per cent. It is at crisis point— at absolute crisis point to have a rate of 48 per cent youth unemployment. It is something that needs to be addressed. Almost half of them out there are struggling to find a job. That is absolutely shameful. What is this government going to do to create jobs? Well, not much because it is too busy employing public servants in the south-east corner and building the Cross River Rail! Only \$1 million has been provided to continue cluster fencing projects—only \$1 million! Because of cluster fencing, 360,000 sheep have already returned to the region and that has, in turn, provided approximately \$4 million in valuable labour. It baffles me how those members opposite cannot see the benefits of investing in more cluster fencing. \$1 million does not go very far. Just ask the people building the Cross River Rail!

I want to draw the House's attention to the lack of investment in the Central Highlands in the latest budget. There are only two projects, both of which have already been announced. If we look at the map on the nice, glossy, shiny brochure put out for Central Queensland, there is funding for a school hall in Emerald—announced about four weeks ago—and a cut in road funding for the Gregory Highway from Emerald to Clermont. That is all we have! The Central Highlands is an economic powerhouse. The Central Highlands produces 15 per cent of Australia's chickpea crop annually and 25 per cent of the nation's mung bean crop. We produced over 180,000 bales of cotton this season alone. We have 380,000 citrus trees which produce 90 per cent of Queensland's mandarin exports. Central Queensland has 4.8 million head of cattle and the Central Highlands alone has one of the greatest beef livestock areas in Australia. We grow more than 150,000 hectares of wheat annually and more than 100,000 head of cattle go through our saleyards each year which equates to approximately \$100 million. We have an emerging macadamia industry with 260,000 new seedlings and trees.

The Central Highlands also pays approximately \$380 million in royalties from resources companies each year, yet not one red cent has been allocated for agriculture investment in the Central Highlands in the 2017-18 budget. However, we have this shiny brochure with a map on it. I can just imagine when the Mayor of the Central Highlands Regional Council, Kerry Hayes—a big supporter of agriculture himself from a council that supports agriculture as a main pillar of the economy—would have done when he opened this brochure. He would have looked at this and he would have been thoroughly disappointed—thoroughly gutted with what has happened to the region of the Central Highlands when it comes to investing in agriculture—but the agricultural economy in the Central Highlands is a powerhouse when it comes to providing its fair share of taxes and GST.

What do we in the Central Highlands get in this budget from the royalties from the mining industry? Two projects! One that has already been announced—funding for a school hall—and a cut in road funding for the Gregory Highway from Emerald to Clermont. It is absolutely disappointing. Not one red cent has been allocated to agriculture investment in the Central Highlands in the 2017-18 budget. The Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries, who is from Central Queensland, has neglected our hardworking farmers and agriculture producers. They are powering ahead developing innovative farm processing practices and working hard to tap into new domestic and international markets, but what is this government doing to support them? It is building Cross River Rail here in Brisbane. Thanks for nothing!

I would also like to raise an issue that is close to our hearts in the Central Highlands and Central West and that is the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme. I cannot stress enough how important the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme is for the people in the electorate of Gregory. In fact, my home town of Emerald has one of the highest uptakes of the scheme in the state. The Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme enables patients to travel away to places like Rockhampton and Brisbane to seek specialist care. It is critical for individuals, families and pensioners. No-one's health should be disadvantaged by their postcode.

The LNP is the only government in over 20 years to recognise that the payment schedule of the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme is outdated, which is why in 2012 Lawrence Springborg, the former health minister, doubled the subsidy. The Ombudsman's report on the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme released last week highlighted significant governance issues with the scheme. The Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme is critical to the people of Gregory and the people of regional Queensland. However, the system is not patient friendly. Patients should not be waiting six months to receive their payments. We need a scheme that provides fast claims processing and payments and one that ensures people in regional Queensland are adequately compensated for patient travel.

Finally, I would like to highlight the need for more funding to be allocated to the upgrade of roads in the electorate of Gregory. These roads are critical to unlocking the potential of our region, boosting productivity and supporting our agriculture industry. Gregory is home to some of the worst roads in Queensland. Take the Tambo-Springsure Road—or the Dawson Developmental Road as it is known. That is the road between Springsure and Tambo. This road is an accident waiting to happen. Families leave their properties and can often be sandwiched between two road trains travelling on this dangerous

gravel road. I do not know about other members, but I would not want my loved ones travelling on a road like that. Since I was elected I have been campaigning hard to secure funding to upgrade the Tambo-Springsure Road. Unfortunately, it seems to have fallen on the deaf ears of those opposite.

Only the LNP recognises the benefit of investing in regional roads. Regional roads are the wealth arteries for regional Queensland. We need these roads sealed as soon as possible. I invite the minister to come and travel on the Tambo-Springsure Road to see how long it takes her to realise that this road drastically needs upgrading straightaway. We are looking at kids trying to get to school and road trains trying to get cattle to the abattoirs. When it comes to agriculture and mining, this is where the wealth comes from for the state government. We need proper roads. I call on the Labor government to make sure that roads are upgraded in that region. Regional Queensland does not just sit along the coast; regional Queensland is all of Queensland. It includes places like Emerald, Blackwater, Barcaldine, Blackall, Longreach, Tambo—

**Mr Stevens:** Richmond!

**Mr MILLAR:** I take that interjection from the member for Mermaid, an old Richmond boy himself. He understands that regional Queensland is more than just towns and cities along the coast. The economic powerhouse of this state is in the heart of the state and includes agriculture and mining royalties which this government is happy to take but, unfortunately, does not like to deliver back to those areas to pay for much needed infrastructure.

I call on this government to invest in regional Queensland—invest in our roads and in infrastructure—and please explain to those people in outback Queensland why it has ripped nearly \$200 million out of the infrastructure budget and nearly \$37 million out of the Central Queensland infrastructure budget when most of that money comes from regional Queensland. I call on the government to make sure that it invests in regional Queensland.