




Speech By  
**Stephen Bennett**

**MEMBER FOR BURNETT**

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Record of Proceedings, 23 August 2018

**ADDRESS-IN-REPLY**

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (4.52 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the address-in-reply. Mr Deputy Speaker Whiting, I will start by asking you to pass on my congratulations to the Speaker. It has been a while since we had the Governor's presentation, but I want to say that the Speaker is doing a great job and I ask you to pass on my appreciation for his work upon his elevation to the role.

It is a real privilege to stand in this place for my third term. I thank the people of Burnett who have elected me as their member. There are a lot of terrific people in my electorate. I am humbled and acknowledge the real privilege I have to represent the Burnett electorate in this 56th Parliament. I pledge to represent them to the best of my ability, as I always have.

It is interesting that what those opposite say is not necessarily what they mean or really think. In the contribution in the first session of the 56th Parliament, we had a quote from the first governor of Queensland, Sir George Bowen. When he opened the parliament in Queensland 150 years ago, he said to the assembled members—

I now congratulate you on the full attainment of the object of your long-sustained efforts and aspirations in the establishment of this separate and independent Legislature, and on the perfect order, decorum, and good feeling, with which the people of Queensland universally exercised their privilege of self-government.

I am sure our forebears would be disappointed in the antics and tactics of the majority Labor government that we see on a daily basis in this 56th Parliament.

The Governor's address acknowledged our role as members of parliament in making laws and decisions that affect everyone. What an impact this government is having on destroying the lives and aspirations of everyday Queenslanders. The opening of parliament did not address the dark cloud that was about to embrace us all—Labor's secret plans of taxes and deceit, including \$2.2 billion of new taxes and fees that were not discussed during the election. We know that these new taxes will destroy jobs, particularly in the Bundaberg region, and will cost Queenslanders more. There were five new taxes—the \$1.3 billion waste levy, the \$400 million wagering tax, the \$300 million land tax, the \$132 million property investors tax and the \$100 million attack on our grey nomads with the stamp duty.

We are seeing higher unemployment rates in Queensland, and let us not forget the unemployment rate locally in my area, where youth unemployment is now the second highest in the nation, hitting nearly 30 per cent. The prediction of an \$83 billion debt liability for every Queenslanders is disturbing. We all know how damaging this is for our kids' future and our grandchildren's future. They will share this liability. Let us remember that this is \$3.7 billion worth of interest every year, which equates to \$71 million in interest every week, \$10 million every day, \$420,000 every hour and \$7,000 every minute.

The parliament now has 93 elected representatives, up from 89. This was its first expansion in 32 years, and I welcome all new members to the 56th Parliament. I like many was very surprised and confused that in the presentation of the Governor's speech at the opening of the 56th Parliament there was no mention of the prevention of domestic violence or of child safety. While the issues of the budget

crisis are being realised, I need to reflect on the issues of child safety and domestic violence and what was not said in the Governor's contribution. These were items we wanted to see acknowledged and given a level of importance. None were more important than domestic violence and child safety.

The child safety crisis continues, with the government failing to keep standards in 2017-18. Labor has signed up to the national redress scheme for survivors of child sexual abuse, and we welcome that, but there is no money allocated to that announcement in the budget papers. We hope this is not a cruel hoax for the survivors. The government is also failing to deal with the revolving door of the youth justice system. We have seen that \$40 million is being spent over four years to deal with detention, but there is an ever-increasing deterioration. There is another \$40 million over two years to support children and young people with complex and challenging behaviours, but there are no real solutions other than throwing taxpayers' money at the issue.

Labor's business-as-usual approach will not sort out Queensland's youth justice system. This is on top of a completely bungled attempt to transfer 17-year-old prisoners from adult jails into youth detention centres with no proper plan, as well as the youth bail house initiative, which puts the community at risk and does not help rehabilitate the offenders. Urgent reforms to the blue card system have not been implemented and do not look like being done for a number of years, with no clear date outlined.

After 40-odd reports into child safety over the last decade, we see real concerns with the implementation of the 2012 LNP road map for reforms after the Carmody recommendations. Notably, with a review that is due shortly, not only are many results falling behind the targeted reductions, but many areas have become worse in comparison to the results in 2013-14 and 2015-16. The Carmody inquiry was completed and the recommendations accepted under the LNP. This is the LNP's legacy in child safety. The LNP immediately undertook to implement the recommendations of the inquiry and provided the initial funding needed to make the recommendations a reality. As a result of the LNP's commitment to take real action on child safety, by 2015-16 child safety had improved across all measures and the excessive bureaucratic burden had been drastically reduced, allowing the department's staff to act faster on more-concerning child safety cases and deal with them.

Now, under Labor, child safety has gone backwards and the improvements to the system that the Carmody inquiry envisioned are falling by the wayside. Labor has blown the budget out, yet Queensland's children are now more at risk than ever before. Despite the Carmody reforms, the child safety officers are drowning under unreasonable workloads. That said, we look forward to the review of the reforms in October 2018, when all Queenslanders can make their own assessment about how the system is working.

On a lighter note, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the incoming member for Bundaberg, David Batt. Our community needs a credible local state member who will work constructively with decision-makers at every level and who will contribute to the future of the region by being at the table when the crucial decisions are made. I have every confidence in David Batt. He is the right person for the job and our community knows that he will get on with the job.

I take this opportunity to thank my office staff: Kath and Amity. I wish Melinda, who is now on maternity leave, and her husband, Tim, all the very best for dealing with the new world they are entering. I have great staff and, as we all know, we cannot do our job without our staff. I sincerely call them the brains trust. Without them I would not be able to continue in this job.

I thank the three branches of the LNP in Burnett: the Coral Coast, the Childers and the Bundaberg branches. These are the real volunteers, the real troopers, who continually put up with me and the ever-increasing problems we have at election time, particularly around bullying and harassment. I thank them for their sheer tenacity in standing up to these people on the booths.

I am often reminded that I do not thank my family. I thank my three adult children and my two grandchildren, who very much love the blue caps with 'LNP' on them. Although they do not understand now, I am sure they will in time. I thank my wife, who is now retired but continues to work with me when she elects to. It is great to have that support for things like attending markets and community ventures. It is great to show a united family unit. I sincerely thank her for all she does.

I would like to take this opportunity to again thank the Burnett electorate for putting their trust in me. Time and time again we have to remind ourselves what an incredible honour and privilege it is to be an MP. It is truly humbling. As I enter my third term as an MP I want to assure everyone that I will continue to work hard to deliver real results for our community. While I am proud of what we have achieved together, the job is far from done and there is a lot of work ahead of us. We are working hard. I give my constituents my sincere word that I will continue to be the accessible, approachable and committed representative that they expect and deserve.

Of course, I love my region and want nothing more than to build a better Burnett and a better wider Bundaberg region. The door is always open, as people know, and I always take on the challenges that lie ahead. I want to put a few things on record this afternoon. Electricity pricing continues to be one of the biggest single issues that confronts a rural electorate that relies on high-value irrigated agriculture. Successive governments of all persuasions need to do so much more to make sure that electricity reforms continue to be the No. 1 priority as we go forward.

I also appreciate the initiatives that were started in 2013 relating to rejuvenation, particularly of our national parks. I speak of the Mon Repos visitors centre as an example. Under successive governments we have seen the real progress of this wonderful, world-class, iconic area. Everyone here should take the time to visit it if they have not done so already. Whether or not they attended the Bundaberg promotions night at Parliament House on budget night, they should come and spend some time in the Bundaberg region. We have a lot to show in tourism and it is only going to get better as things like the Mon Repos visitors centre continue to reach their conclusion and fulfilment.

I hope that the HMAS *Tobruk* can reach its full potential and become a world-class dive site. I acknowledge the troubles that have occurred along the way. A lot of those issues have been talked about. We just hope that the safety audits can be made public and that there can be a real and tangible investigation into the righting of the *Tobruk* to where it should be in its correct orientation as per the contracts and considering the expenditure of taxpayers' funds. I say to the House there is a lot of investment in that project. Not only did we all put in our own money in the early days, each council put in \$1.25 million as well as the federal government gifting the state government the *Tobruk* for a tourism outcome. Clearly, we are all very disappointed and we hope that there is transparency in the conversation about what the righting of the *Tobruk* may or may not look like. The minister is in the House and I thank him for listening. I am a realist. If the *Tobruk* cannot be righted, I think the community would like us to do that. I know he is doing his due diligence with the stakeholders and we look forward to a successful outcome in that space.

I also want to acknowledge the vastness of my electorate, which sits in the Wide Bay, whether it is north to Turkey Beach through Agnes Water, Seventeen Seventy, Miriam Vale, Bororen, or whether it picks up Baffle Creek and, of course, south to Childers and Buxtonville. The great people of the Burnett electorate are like every other Queenslander: looking for aspiration, looking for opportunity and looking for the government to create an environment in which they can thrive and get on with life. In places like Bundy we have also seen the real mark of success and enterprise. I speak of things like builders' trailers. I am starting to observe—I have a building background—that there is a bit of a resurgence in the building sector. We just hope that these sorts of activities will continue to drive the economy. Both the federal and the state governments need to continue to ensure we create an environment where small business and, particularly, those mums and dads have an outcome.

It has already been touched on, but I again want to stress the message about the drought. I appreciate the complexities of the committees that have to be formed. The last drought declaration for the Bundaberg region was made on 16 August. I can tell honourable members that it is not access to water but the sheer cost of irrigating that again has confronted us. Most of those farmers had a fairly successful time in making investment decisions about their rotational crops, particularly things like soybeans, mung beans and peanuts. This year we will again see those farmers letting that ground sit there. I think the economic drivers are there for looking seriously at some sort of intervention in terms of allowing Ergon to give us the tariff relief. I think it might be better to think about taking it out of the hands of the local committees because, clearly, bureaucratic decisions about rainfall and other decisions are not going to allow the outcome we want.

To Geoff Campbell, Robert Edgar, Christopher McLaughlan and all the guys and girls who helped during the election, I sincerely say thank you. In conclusion, I again want to reiterate how much of a privilege it is to represent the electorate of Burnett. I thank everyone in this House for continuing to do the best we can for Queensland. It is a great honour and a privilege to serve in this place.