




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MACKAY

Record of Proceedings, 14 June 2019

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

 **Mrs GILBERT** (Mackay—ALP) (2.37 pm): The Mackay region is economically and culturally dynamic. My region is built on the sugar industry, services to the mining industry and the mining equipment, technology and services—METS—sector. Mackay is developing and expanding into advanced manufacturing and also growing its markets. Since 2015, Mackay's economy has been supported by the policies and the economic vision of the Palaszczuk government. I have given a commitment to my community to ensure that our region continues to grow and diversify. This budget delivers for my community.

For decades, the sugar industry has been an integral part of the Mackay economy. During the peak crush time, the sugar industry supports upwards of 800 jobs. These jobs are on farms, in the sugar mill, in the sugar refinery, at the cogeneration electricity generation plant, as transport operators on locomotives and lorries going out to the port, as bulk handlers loading the ships and many more. The cane industry has the potential to take the lead in the future industries for my region—in biofuels and biofutures.

I am excited to be a member of the Palaszczuk government that has contributed \$40 million to Mackay Sugar to assist in maintenance to secure an investor to reinvigorate the business and secure jobs for Mackay not just now but into the future.

Mackay is home to the famous Paget engineering precinct and also home to many of the drive-in drive-out miners in the Bowen Basin. Everyone in my community knows someone associated with mining. It will always be exciting to see new sustainable projects announced in the resource sector, but we also must be mindful of protecting workers. No worker's job should make them unwell. Nearly \$1.2 million will see a health service on wheels deliver vital medical checks to coal workers throughout regional Queensland. The new mobile health screening service, an equipped and staffed van, will mean that respiratory health checks would be accessible to more Queensland coalmine workers. The health and safety of all Queenslanders is a top priority for the Palaszczuk government. This new mobile service will ensure increased respiratory checks and improve the health outcomes of thousands of coal workers across the state. The mobile screening service will help improve the detection of workers' pneumoconiosis, black lung, silicosis and other mine dust lung diseases.

Queensland's coal workers receive free respiratory health checks when they start in the industry, when they leave and every five years while they are working. Free checks are also available for retired or former coalmine workers. All doctors and radiologists who offer health services receive specialist training and are registered, as are the X-ray imaging clinics. The screening will supplement existing services in Mackay and other mining communities like Moranbah, Clermont and Emerald. Living in the heart of the mining industry and being on the Coal Workers' Pneumoconiosis Select Committee, I am aware of the effects that these coal dust related diseases can have on workers. This service is another step that will aid in the detection of this insidious disease. While speaking about health, this budget is another record health budget with \$463 million for the Mackay Hospital and Health Service. The value of good health cannot be measured.

Education is our passport to the future. Students and our dedicated, hardworking teachers deserve to have quality, well maintained classrooms and learning spaces. Mackay has a range of different types of school buildings, from heritage listed schools to new modern facilities. Some of the big winners in upgrades include \$460,000 of \$500,000 for Mackay Central State School's refurbishment of its heritage listed timber windows; \$500,000 for Fitzgerald State School to install dividing walls in some of their classrooms; \$150,000 for Victoria Park State School to refurbish the positive learning centre; and \$500,000 to refurbish the administration block at Glenella State School. These are just some of the financed works in this budget.

When some of our students leave school they seek out an apprenticeship. It is important to give our young people and mature workers an opportunity to access training and skills. The continuation of the 50 per cent payroll tax apprentice and trainee rebate to 30 June 2020 has already given confidence to businesses in my region to up their intake of apprentices. Future employment in our region is set to be strong. In fact, despite what is said by those opposite about unemployment in Mackay, we have one of the lowest unemployment rates in the state. On the Seek website there are usually about 1,500 vacancies in a range of employment opportunities. In my region we need to support small and medium businesses to invest, expand and grow and entice more workers into the region and to upskill our current workers to meet new employment skill opportunities.

The Mackay Chamber of Commerce has been asking for relief with payroll tax for our local small to medium sized businesses. The lifting of the payroll tax threshold from \$1.1 million to \$1.3 million is welcomed by them. We also want our workers to live in our regional communities. The new discount rate for businesses having more than 85 per cent of their employees outside South-East Queensland is also welcomed. The new rebate for employment growth, providing a payroll rebate of up to \$20,000 for businesses that can demonstrate they have increased the number of full-time employees, is good for business. It is also good for employees who want the security of full-time work.

As I have said, the unemployment rate in Mackay is low and businesses have taken up Skilling Queenslanders for Work and Back to Work programs with tremendous results. When Mackay was in the early stages of coming out of the construction downturn, employers were nervous about the long-term stability of the works coming down the pipeline. The state government's employment support programs gave businesses the confidence to take on trainees and skilled workers and this was great for our unemployment rate.

In my region we love participating in sport. Our junior sports fields are bursting with the young and not-so-very-young on the weekends. It is tremendous to see whole families getting involved in sport. Some clubs tell me that when parents come to watch their children play they get involved in the club and quite often they join a team themselves. Our smaller clubs work extremely hard to fundraise and provide facilities to cater for both male and female participation. City Brothers Football Club, with an allocation of over \$407,000, will construct an amenities block, including toilets, change rooms, showers, parent room, storage and gymnasium facilities for people who want to participate, be social and maybe get fit along the way and also those who want to upskill to the elite level.

When the economy is doing well, workers and their families move into the region and pressure begins to appear on the rental market, and those with the least ability to compete in the housing market where prices are rising become vulnerable. I am pleased there will be four new units of accommodation constructed at a cost of just over \$1 million.

The current Leader of the Opposition has become obsessed with roads in my region. I received a phone call from one of the chamber of commerce board members in Mackay asking what was in the budget for the Mackay Ring Road. He said LNP Brisbane wanted to know and had asked him to call and run a campaign for them. There are huge roads projects in my region. They just keep rolling out: the Mackay Ring Road stage 1 is set to be completed next year, weather permitting; work on the Bruce Highway northern access upgrade, which will have additional lanes added where the ring-road exits, is due to get underway; the Walkerston Bypass is due to commence when stage 1 of the ring-road is complete—the first two kilometres has already been constructed with the Mackay Ring Road stage 1; \$70 million has been secured for the Mackay Port Access Road, formerly known as Mackay Ring Road stage 2. A new port access road will help move freight quicker and easier than ever before and move heavy vehicles from the streets of Mackay. I commend the bills to the House.