




Speech By  
**Lachlan Millar**

**MEMBER FOR GREGORY**

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

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (5.34 pm): The Labor Treasurer, Jackie Trad, is boasting that this is a 'record' budget—a record for this, a record for that, a record for all this. The one record that the Treasurer does not mention is that this budget represents a record debt for Queensland. In forward estimates it will be near to \$90 billion—\$19,000 for every man, woman and child. A Queensland family of five will carry a debt equivalent to \$95,000. The Treasurer put on her best voice as she spoke to the television news audiences last night when she said, 'This is an entirely manageable debt level for the state,' as if that means anything. Of course someone is going to have to manage it, and every thoughtful Queenslanders knows who. It is the regions. This debt started under Labor premiers Beattie and Bligh and it has not only continued but increased under the Palaszczuk Labor government. This record debt will continue to be a brake, choking our prosperity for our children and our grandchildren for decades to come.

The other promotional line being run by the government is that this budget is somewhat of a 'love letter' to the regions. As a member who represents a quarter of Queensland's land mass in the heart of the state, let me tell members that this budget is more of an 'IOU' note than a love letter. Just looking at some of the announcements in Gregory, the Black Gully Waste Water Treatment Plant upgrade was first announced at the beginning of May 2017 and was meant to be completed by June 2018. As it is only getting \$1 million of the required \$5 million, completion may still not be in sight. Take that as an IOU. In terms of passing lanes on the Capricorn Highway between Gracemere and Emerald, the department has been talking about this since anyone can remember. It was actually announced in last year's budget and was due for completion in November this year, but the till must have been empty even though the federal government is contributing to the cost and, again, in this budget the allocation is short of the full spend. Take that as an IOU note.

The Emerald Saleyards upgrade is another reannouncement of partial funding. It was first announced in March this year as part of a successful application by the Central Highlands Regional Council in round 4 of Building our Regions grants to local government. The construction of Rookwood Weir will absolutely have a positive impact on the most eastern part of Gregory, but the locals had a good laugh reading the Rockhampton *Morning Bulletin* when the minister and the member for Rockhampton visited on a tour of inspection the other day. They were having a good old bout of mutual admiration when everyone knows that the federal government had to drag the Palaszczuk government kicking and screaming to the table on this one. It is reassuring to see it in the state budget, but its allocation of \$83 million out of the \$352 million project total is a major IOU as well. That is four regional IOUs and counting, and we have not even crossed the great divide!

In the western part of the Gregory electorate top of the list is the Blackall Hospital redevelopment. This was a \$17.9 million project. It was always a bridesmaid and never a bride. Announced in 2017, it was allocated \$5 million in the 2017-18 budget, but the IOU was considerably more than \$12.9 million

because the Palaszczuk government only delivered \$361,000 of the \$5 million allocated. That is the first IOU. Then in the 2018-19 budget the Treasurer gave a further \$1.3 million and said—

... whether you live in Brisbane or Blackall. Labor is doing the things we said we would do ...

That is the second IOU. Now the project starts in its third budget, but will it get the over \$16 million needed to complete the project? One would hope so, but no. In 2019-20 we get an allocation of \$2.7 million, an IOU of \$13,609,000 and the Treasurer's flattery that 'when the regions are doing well, Queensland is doing well'.

The Boulia community hospital is in the same position, with an allocation of \$3.9 million for a \$7.2 million refurbishment—another multimillion IOU. This is all in just one regional electorate. That pretty much finishes the funding for Gregory in this budget.

There is a road pavement and widening project between Longreach and Winton, but this project is part of the partnership with the federal government's Northern Australia Roads Program, so the contribution is unclear. There is \$100,000 allocated out of the \$3.1 million that is needed to replace the Longreach Fire Station and roughly half of the \$7.6 million needed for the upgrade of the Barcaldine Power Station and substation. That is one electorate IOU note from the Treasurer. That is not investing in our regions and certainly does not address our true infrastructure needs.

The real story of this budget is one of wasted money and poor priorities. In the portfolio of road investment, we see \$240 million put into building cyclepaths in Brisbane while our regional roads fall apart. In a record Health budget, we see the Central Queensland Hospital and Health Service described in the budget paper as suffering from ageing infrastructure, poor IT capacity and a difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff. Where is the investment in these areas? The total budget increase for the Central Queensland Hospital and Health Service is only \$12.5 million for a hospital budget of \$622.8 million. The Blackwater Hospital gets nothing. I ask members to google an image of the Blackwater Hospital. That facility is supposed to cater for a town that is a major contributor to the Treasurer's record take from coal royalties.

Springsure and Woorabinda have also been neglected. I am told that renal dialysis patients are being transported to Rockhampton for regular treatments. They are slightly better off than the dialysis patients in Emerald and Longreach. For \$500,000, we could have had renal dialysis chairs in both of those towns. I remind members of the \$240 million for bike paths. I think of what these patients would say. They pay their taxes, they work, they contribute to our state's revenues, yet we are literally losing lives over a relatively small investment in renal dialysis in Longreach and Emerald.

When Lawrence Springborg left the office of health minister, he left elective surgery waiting times of 27 days. Last financial year, the median wait time for elective surgery in the Central West was 259 days. Other KPIs have suffered similar blowouts and nothing seems to change. Queensland Health staggers along from crisis to crisis. There is no money to address the pitiful funding of patient travel for regional patients. I ask members to try to find accommodation close to a Brisbane hospital for anywhere near \$60 a night.

The Treasurer cited record investment in education, but except for the replacement of air conditioners at Emerald State High School, which is maintenance, all the schools in the Gregory electorate seem to have missed out. School infrastructure in my electorate is ageing, but nothing is done. Since I was elected I have been advocating for the bus infrastructure at Emerald State High School to be massively upgraded. The campus acts as a school bus interchange for every child who travels to school by bus, so even the preppies must visit the campus twice daily to change buses. Yet the infrastructure there is 50 years old. I fear we are putting young lives in danger. We need to fix that.

Students who live most remotely in the Gregory electorate are among the small handful who receive assistance from the state government to attend boarding school, because there is no other way to ensure their access to a quality senior education. Yet again, this budget does not address the growing gap between the subsidy and the actual cost. The subsidy needs a one-off increase to catch up with reality and then CPI increases annually. Instead, families, many of whom have had no income for years due to drought, are somehow expected to fund the gap of thousands of dollars per child. This is not equality of opportunity for remote students. We have to remember that there are primary schools in these areas for these students but not high schools. We need to be able to send them to a high school to receive a high school education.

I will now move to regional cost-of-living issues. Electricity costs in regional Queensland are crippling. The publican at the Barcoo Hotel in Blackall has found that installing a diesel generator proved to be a sensible investment. Similarly, irrigation farmers are screaming out for a food and fibre tariff, but I can see nothing in this budget indicating practical plans for relief.

The other issue is transportation. Of the over 40 towns and settlements in my electorate, none has public transport. Ownership of private vehicles is the only option and most households have to register multiple vehicles just to get to work. Increasing the cost of vehicle registration well above the rate of inflation and with none of those funds coming back in the form of better roads and public transport is a double insult to those Queenslanders. Although the Treasurer might have said the word 'region' nearly 40 times in her speech, this budget is not about the regions at all.

I turn to the portfolio of Fire and Emergency Services. In this year's budget we have seen a more than 70 per cent decrease in the number of rural fire brigade trucks to be constructed compared to the number last year. The latest building of rural fire trucks has simply replaced the 20-year-old, aged fleet rather than providing trucks to those brigades that do not have them. Although the overall fleet of the Rural Fire Service Queensland has grown slightly, according to the Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland there is still not enough trucks to meet community defence needs.

One such example is the rural fire brigade of Mount Ossa, which is located just north of Mackay. Although that brigade is not as big as some, there are 52 members, including 18 active members, who look after an area covering 175 square kilometres. This brigade does not have a truck, but it has five slip-on trailer units that are used to fight fires. This brigade has no fire shed, and would benefit from one, and no truck, and would benefit from one. During the recent fires in the region, the members of this brigade had to use their own vehicles to fight fires at their own personal expense. The brigade has had to rely on the support of local farmers to complete its fire hazard reduction program and we know how important it is to be able to do that properly. In fact, recently, the Mount Ossa brigade applied for a communication grant and the supporting letter from the local RFSQ inspector truly demonstrated the need for a fire truck.

This is just one story of the many fire brigades throughout Queensland that require trucks so that they can respond to and manage fires in their local areas. This is just one brigade of many in Queensland that needs a fire truck. We also know that there are brigades in Townsville, Charters Towers and areas around Cairns that urgently need fire trucks to ensure that they can service and protect their communities. Our rural fire volunteers deserve proper and adequate equipment so that they can be safe and properly protect our communities.

This brings me to something a little bit closer to home that I have just mentioned. In the budget, the new Longreach Fire Station has been allocated only \$100,000 towards its construction. It needs \$3.1 million to complete construction. Basically, the government has given that community \$100,000. What are they going to do? Put down the cement base, buy a couple of ladders and maybe a kettle for the kitchen? They need to have that fire station now. For the government to put that measly allocation of \$100,000 for the construction of the Longreach Fire Station into a shiny brochure and say that it is delivering for regional and outback Queensland is an insult and that community will see through that. I have been past the land where that fire station is to be constructed. It has been marked out. It has been surveyed. The project is ready to go. Why not give the community the \$3.1 million they need so that we can get this fire station up and going now? The people of Longreach need to have the best services out there so that they can fight fires. We need to give them the facilities to do that. I call on the minister to give the Longreach Fire Station the full amount it needs of \$3.1 million. Last year during estimates I asked the minister about this allocation and he said to me that it was coming. One hundred thousand dollars is not enough.

In relation to marine rescue funding, there remains no reprieve to solving the questions that the Blue Water Review unearthed and brought to light. The minister and the department have failed to provide certainty to the two marine rescue operations and the thousands of volunteers. The future of marine rescue in Queensland should have been solved and funded by this budget but, once again, thousands of boaties along the Queensland coast rely on our volunteer marine rescue organisations. When the Blue Water Review was instigated by the minister, there was confidence that we would have had this issued solved well before this budget came down because of the allocation that we need to give to the coastguard and Volunteer Marine Rescue. Right now, the Blue Water Review is not clear. We do not know what direction this government is going in. Is the government going to bring together the coastguard and Volunteer Marine Rescue service? What is the future for these organisations?

The coastguard and the Volunteer Marine Rescue are first responders. If a person is out at sea and their boat is leaking, or has run out of fuel, or they have hit rough seas and they cannot get to shore, they need someone to pick them up. The only people who can get to them are the coastguard and Volunteer Marine Rescue. We have to treat and fund the coastguard and Volunteer Marine Rescue like they are first responders. Many Queenslanders are boaties and go out to sea. They need to have the assurance that they have the best possible coastguard and Volunteer Marine Rescue service available to make sure they have first responders when there is an emergency. I call on the minister to move on that now.