




Speech By  
**Michael Berkman**

**MEMBER FOR MAIWAR**

---

Record of Proceedings, 14 June 2019

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

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (3.34 pm): I rise to speak to the 2019 budget and revenue bills and to outline the Greens' response to the Queensland budget. In an age of growing danger from climate breakdown, rising inequality, stagnating wages and housing stress, Tuesday's budget was a tremendous missed opportunity. The crises we face are connected and so are the solutions, and that is the message I am hoping the government will take from my contribution today.

The Treasurer made some really important observations about climate change in her budget speech. She noted that places like Queensland stand to lose the most, that we are paying the price of climate change right now and that it will only grow over time. She said that if we do not act now climate change will have massive economic impacts and that in response to climate change our leadership must be global and local. Yet despite the rhetoric this budget offers almost nothing new to meaningfully address climate change. Despite the rhetoric around the need for global and local leadership, only 24 hours after the Deputy Premier spoke these words, Queensland Labor gave Adani yet another green light—one it considers to be the last major hurdle. This is a seriously warped view of global and local leadership on climate change.

Does the Treasurer seriously consider opening up one of the largest untapped thermal coal reserves in the world is what it means to be a global leader on climate change? It is hard to imagine a more flagrant denial of reality. It is fanciful to try to describe Queensland Labor as a global leader on climate the day before it put science in the bin and waved through a project like Adani.

The Treasurer reminded us of the 84 disasters and the \$15 billion in damage Queenslanders have endured over the last 10 years. The budget does not tell us about the people who die in those disasters, the homes that are lost, the farmers and graziers who suffer, the landscapes that burn. The Treasurer is right that floods, droughts, bushfires and cyclones will only get worse, but she ignores that her government is adding fuel to the fire.

How about local leadership? The budget's focus on the regions is commendable and absolutely necessary, but it is missing some essential elements that the regions need to adjust through the inevitable change that is coming. More than ever, it is clear that Labor has taken the wrong lessons from the federal election right down to this budget. It has caved in to Adani and bought into the narrative that the result in Queensland is down to its indecision on this one project, which is in my mind complete rubbish. Just imagine if, instead of sitting on the fence about Adani, Labor had offered an honest, concrete transition plan away from thermal coal with massive investment into regional jobs, housing and retraining funded by taxes on big corporations. If Labor will not offer them hope, it is no wonder voters abandoned them.

Queensland and Australia will cop the damage from climate breakdown first and hardest, but we also stand to benefit the most from a cleaner future. The Treasurer says we must show local leadership on climate change, and local leadership must start with an honest conversation about the future of

thermal coal. The International Energy Agency now accepts that global demand for thermal coal peaked more than five years ago and is in long-term decline. The IPCC has made crystal clear that thermal coal must be out of our energy mix by 2050 if we are to avoid catastrophic global warming.

This fact is reflected in the budget itself. It is squirrelled away in a corner of Budget Paper No. 2 on page 38. It is stated explicitly that thermal coal exports are forecast to decline, but this government continues to deny reality and refuses to have these tough but necessary conversations with the communities that will be most directly affected. Leaving to one side the utter lies Adani continues to peddle on job numbers, employment from existing thermal coal mining and eventually from gas fracking must be replaced.

Instead, the Treasurer, the Premier and apparently everyone else in this place continues to offer false hope. They carry on with the fantasy that thermal coal mining in the Galilee Basin is the solution to regional Queensland's employment woes. Our regions are desperate for jobs, and fair enough. We all want the same basic things—a good stable job, secure housing and a bright future for our kids and communities. This is what Labor needed to offer in the federal election but it failed to. Until the state budget commits to taxing big corporations to pay for a massive transition plan for thermal coal workers, nothing will change. You do not transition away from thermal coal by opening new thermal coal mines, you do not provide hope by swallowing the coal billionaire's talking points, and you cannot provide an alternative if you are not willing to go after big mining companies to fund it.

The Greens are not saying that all our coalmines and exports should be shut down overnight—far from it. Metallurgical coal comprised more than 70 per cent of Queensland's coal exports in the 2018 calendar year. On the other hand, thermal coal is not a big money-spinner. It is just not. It is estimated that thermal coal generated about half a billion dollars in royalties during 2018, only about one-seventh of the royalties from metallurgical coal. It generated less than half the costs we have incurred from natural disasters since November last year and far less than car registration.

We have a bad track record in Australia of dealing with industrial transitions. To see that we can look to the towns gutted by the end of car making in Victoria and South Australia; forestry in Tasmania; or the fallout in Mackay, Gladstone, Chinchilla and Clermont when the mining boom turned to bust. Coal towns have sacrificed so much to keep the lights on and build our common prosperity, so we cannot leave them to the chaos of the market as thermal coal declines.

There is so much work to do across Queensland, and retooling our economy to make it cleaner and fairer will create a lot of jobs. We have 32,000 people on our social housing waiting list, and we have tens of thousands of homes in North Queensland that need protection from extreme weather. Degraded rivers, farmlands and natural spaces in need of restoration can create livelihoods for thousands, not least of all the first nations of this vast and ancient continent.

Rehabilitating abandoned mines creates jobs. Exporting Queensland's sunshine to the world as hydrogen creates jobs. Green jobs are not just building solar farms and wind turbines, although there is no shortage on offer in that space. A teacher has a green job, so does a nurse and so does an aged-care worker. A cleaner, fairer society is about looking after each other as well as our planet. Instead of siding with coal bosses, Labor could follow our lead and announce a massive plan to make sure everyone has a decent home, powered by 100 per cent clean energy that is publicly owned—not far off in the future, but right here and now.

That future is also entirely possible only if we make big companies pay their fair share. The Greens took a plan to the last state election to raise coal and gas royalties to at least 18 per cent—about level with international averages. Just by doing that, we could raise \$20 billion over five years. We can only speculate that the government's inertia on the transition away from thermal coal is driven by the same kind of political influence and vested interests that drove its recent negotiations on coal royalties, although I think calling it negotiations is perhaps putting it a little too high; it looked much more like rolling over.

The Treasurer recently meekly asked for a voluntary contribution of \$70 million from some of the biggest companies on earth—this is, by any measure, a pitiful amount compared to what the state could have recovered from raising the royalty rate for coal. Even more concerning, the coal billionaires were allowed to decide how much they wanted to contribute. How is it fair that big coalmining companies get to choose how much extra tax they are going to pay? Ordinary Queenslanders do not get that choice. This gives a clear line of sight on the real-world outcomes of the access and influence enjoyed by corporate donors and industry lobbyists at the expense of ordinary Queenslanders. I strongly welcome the government's decision to raise royalties on gas companies for fracking and LNG. We cannot plan for and fund the transition away from fossil fuels, including both gas and thermal coal, without taxing the multinational mining companies that have already taken so much.

I welcome and applaud the additional school spending in the budget. Indooroopilly State High School will finally see an injection of \$12 million for the construction of a new multiuse facility. Indooroopilly State High School is an outstanding school. It produces brilliant, engaged young minds, and the growth in enrolments over the last decade reflects this. It has grown to the point that the school cannot hold an assembly in one place, but this new facility will see that problem fixed. My thanks go to the principal, Lois O'Reilly, all the staff and the P&C for their efforts in getting this off the ground. I cannot wait for the first UN Day celebrations or award ceremony where the junior and senior schools can come together to celebrate their achievements.

About half a billion dollars of additional funds has been set aside for the Building Future Schools initiative, which will see master planning and expansion for a number of overcrowded schools in the electorate. This kind of expansion work is necessary. I am aware that master planning is underway at a number of my local schools. Of course, while this planning is welcome, we also need to see substantial additional funding for the construction of the newly planned facilities. Moreover, new buildings on existing campuses will only solve the overcrowding in Maiwar schools for a short while. There are more and more families moving into the area as infill development continues. Unsurprisingly, the real pinch point seems to be in the immediate vicinity of the old Taringa state school, which was shut down and sold to developers about 20 years ago. We need a new school in the inner west, and I am calling on the government, again, to get investigations underway and set aside the funds required to purchase property for a new school campus.

Before the budget was brought down I wrote twice to the Treasurer requesting that the state government contribute to the purchase of the old ABC site at Toowong. This site could be the west side's answer to New Farm Park—a beautiful riverside sanctuary in an area now dominated by really high-density living. A walking and cycling bridge that is itself a work of public art could be Brisbane's answer to New York's High Line. It is easy to get sidetracked, since there are so many exciting ideas, but they include bringing back the Toowong public pool, a new community garden, an outdoor amphitheatre and a community hall for events and fundraisers. So much of the high-rise development in our city has been driven by a quest for private luxury. A new riverside park here would be a little bit of communal luxury—something increasingly missing from our lives.

Local Aboriginal elders have also shared with us the story of the songline running from West End at Kurilpa, across the river up to Mount Coot-tha. Many of the 2½ thousand people who took part in our massive community vote strongly supported an Aboriginal community controlled space as part of any new park. Brisbane City Council has finally committed to consider buying part of the site as a landing point for a new bridge. Now is the time for the state government to come to the table.

I move on now to the new prison spend in the budget. Building new prisons will not fix overcrowding and it will not make anyone safer. To build and operate the new and expanded prisons, both youth prisons and adult prisons, the government is planning to spend \$1½ billion dollars from 2018 to 2022. That is on top of the \$1.2 billion per year that it already costs us to run youth and adult prisons. Just imagine how many lives we could transform with \$1½ billion. That is about triple the spending on building or upgrading social housing this year. It is more than we are spending on the 12 new schools across Queensland of which the government is so proud—and rightly so. Yes, the government is putting some extra money into diversionary programs and social services. However, while we are building new prisons, they will keep filling up.

Keeping people, especially young kids, locked up does not address the causes of crime, poverty and discrimination. It does not get kids out of adult watch houses and it does not address the shocking, racist overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids as young as 10 in prison. I am reiterating the Greens' call for a moratorium on all new prisons, both youth prisons and adult prisons, and for the government to raise the age of criminal responsibility to at least 14. We need to build homes, schools and communities, not new prisons.

I welcome the government's commitment to extend the Taxi Subsidy Scheme—at the eleventh hour—after sustained pressure from advocacy organisations and 6,000 signatories on a public petition. It is the responsibility of both state and federal governments to make the transition to the NDIS work, but I was certainly disappointed with how long it took for this sensible decision to be made.

I welcome the government's commitments on payroll tax, and I would note the Greens' longstanding policy of phasing out payroll tax. We should be taxing things we do not like and the things we do not want, such as pollution and waste, instead of things we do want, such as wages.

I will be voting for both appropriation bills and for the revenue bill, although as I noted this morning, I am on call at the moment as my partner is now six days overdue to give birth. If I am not in the chamber late this evening to vote in favour of this legislation, I trust that Mr Speaker and my fellow members will excuse my absence.