




Speech By  
**Patrick Weir**

**MEMBER FOR CONDAMINE**

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

 **Mr WEIR** (Condamine—LNP) (11.39 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Appropriation Bill 2019. The 2019-20 budget was supposed to be a budget for the regions but, unfortunately, once again the regions have largely missed out. Whilst this Labor government is happy to take the natural resources of the regions and use the royalties gained from those resources to prop up its debt ridden government, there is little investment in return—not in infrastructure or employment, and certainly not in our youth. The unexpected increase in royalties with no consultation taking place will be damaging to the industry.

Royalties on the petroleum sector will increase by 2.5 per cent to 12.5 per cent. Comments by Ian Mcfarlane from the Queensland Resources Council are very concerning. He said—

This will make Queensland gas less competitive and we will risk jobs, future investment and the creation of new jobs.

This is very concerning for regional jobs. Further, Mr Mcfarlane stated—

In Townsville two weeks ago, the Premier said, 'There will be no royalty increase in this year's budget.' Today we discover that's not the case.

According to the Infrastructure Investment Report for 2018, Queensland has achieved the largest drop in investor confidence in the whole of Australia. Our economy has stalled, with growth at less than three per cent. Due to the economy flatlining, there are now 26,000 fewer jobs expected by 2021-22 compared to last year's budget outlook. Our two major state competitors, New South Wales and Victoria, are now almost three times more attractive for infrastructure investors than Queensland, with jobs in Queensland suffering. Business confidence in Queensland is at an all-time low, with the April CommSec State of the States putting Queensland in sixth place in the nation, on the bottom half of the economic ladder.

Queensland is spiralling headlong towards a massive debt of \$90 billion. Even with the massive coal royalty windfall, introducing nine new taxes and tax increases, Labor still has to increase borrowings to plug the budget black hole while recklessly racking up more debt. Investment in infrastructure is a large component of any economy. With investment in infrastructure comes employment, directly or indirectly, and it increases the confidence of the business sector. Members of the Labor government are always talking up infrastructure but never deliver the goods. The cold, hard truth is that Labor is borrowing more and building less. This is demonstrated clearly in the forward estimates which have actually decreased by \$23 million compared to last year.

In Condamine, private enterprise is investing in infrastructure projects. There is the FKG Group with its large-scale intensive greenhouse project, the Qantas pilot training academy located at the Wagner owned Wellcamp Airport and the largest medicinal cannabis greenhouse facility in the world, located near the Wellcamp Airport. Once approvals required are given, these projects will provide permanent employment for approximately 1,869 people. That is what happens when investment is made in infrastructure.

The private sector approached the Labor government with more than 300 proposal ideas that either were knocked back or shackled by bureaucracy. The lack of investment by the Labor government is why Queensland's roads are deteriorating, creating road safety concerns. It is why our schools are overcrowded and academic results are in decline, while ambulance ramping has increased and public hospitals are back to the appalling state they were in prior to the change of government in 2012. When the LNP were last in government ambulance ramping was significantly reduced, and Labor's unacceptable waiting list for public dental patients was reduced to zero.

Roads are extremely important no matter where we live. However, in rural and regional Queensland almost everything travels on road. All of our agricultural and horticultural products travel on roads—grain, cattle, sheep, cotton, vegetables, fruit and wool—for most of their journey to their end marketplace. Rail freight is virtually non-existent. This means our roads have the constant weight of heavy vehicles traversing them, particularly at harvest times.

In the Condamine electorate we have some appalling roads, with some of these roads being reduced to a 60-kilometre-per-hour speed limit due to the dangerous condition of the surface. The notorious Bowenville-Norwin road, which I have spoken about on many occasions, was allocated \$4.32 million prior to the budget. This funding would supposedly completely rehabilitate 24 kilometres of the 27-kilometre road. This road runs across a floodplain, so after years of flood events it now has large humps and holes and a great deal of neglect. Recently I drove on the first section of this road that has been rehabilitated to what the minister thinks is an acceptable standard. I suggest that it remains unacceptable as there is already evidence of deep tracks on this section.

There was no funding in this budget for the Pittsworth-Clifton road, for Brimblecombe Road where a mother and daughter lost their lives in October last year, for the Oakey-Pittsworth road and the rail crossing at Davidson Street in Oakey or in fact for a simple pedestrian crossing in the main street of Pittsworth. The Department of Transport and Main Roads' infrastructure budget has been cut by \$853 million at the same time that another \$758 million was poured into Cross River Rail. Labor is cutting road and rail projects across regional Queensland to safeguard its members' seats in Brisbane.

Revenue from vehicle registration will rise from \$1.85 billion in 2018-19 to \$2.12 billion across the forward estimates on the back of above-CPI registration hikes. This is a broken promise by this government and another example of Labor treating Queensland motorists like cash cows. The Labor government has increased registration fees by 3.5 per cent four years in a row.

Under this Labor government, revenue from speed camera fines continued to escalate, from \$160.6 million in 2017-18 to \$189.4 million in 2018-19, and is forecast to rise to over \$206 million in 2019-20. There is well-founded growing community concern about the level of fines and the placement of cameras which indicates that the government is using speed cameras as cash cows and not exclusively for road safety purposes.

There are 35 schools in the seat of Condamine of which Wyreema State School is the only one to receive funding for the construction of additional classrooms. Bunkers Hill, Cambooya and Gowrie state schools received no funding, even though all have issues that require attention to ensure their students receive the best possible educational and social outcomes.

Community representatives and I requested the Minister for Education conduct a business case study for the purchase of land south-west of Toowoomba for construction of a secondary state school in the future. The area south-west of Toowoomba is experiencing particularly rapid growth and, with the current secondary schools in Toowoomba at or over student capacity, there will be a need for another secondary educational facility within 10 years or even sooner.

Queensland's public health system is at breaking point and yet we see a cut to the Queensland Health capital budget this year of \$203 million. This is yet another example of where there is more borrowing but less investment in infrastructure. The cut of \$203.5 million represents 630 full-time-equivalent jobs lost in construction alone. In March this year, major hospitals across the south-east had the 'no vacancy' sign up with a code yellow crisis. One of my staff's mother-in-law was one of the many patients left waiting in an ambulance for a bed to become vacant after suffering a major heart attack.

Once again, this government sees an increase in ambulance ramping and allowed elective waiting times to blow out. Once more, emergency departments are experiencing overcrowding. The LNP has a proud health record, for example doubling the subsidy to help patients travel to hospitals, particularly in rural and regional Queensland, enabling them to access services when needed. The LNP appointed the first ever Mental Health Commissioner and ensured the new Mental Health Commission received the resources it needed to improve mental health and to minimise the harmful impacts of substance abuse in our communities.

I have spoken inside and outside this House about the scourge of drugs in our regions, particularly ice. We heard members of the Palaszczuk government talk about the need for support and rehabilitation facilities, but we still await action. The lives of how many more families will be destroyed while they wait? These families need action, not excuses.

It is no coincidence that crime in these communities is on the rise as a result of this drug scourge. In the past few weeks in Condamine we have had two stores ram-raided and robbed in Gowrie and Kingthorpe and last night at Zimms Corner. The general stores in Biddeston and Pampas have been robbed. On the Darling Downs, unlawful entry is up 22 per cent, from 1,398 in 2014-15 to 1,706 in 2017-18.

I have been campaigning for months for a second permanent police officer to be stationed at Cambooya, and still there is no relief for the one police officer. The Oakey Police Station has seven officers and only one vehicle. For months the Pittsworth community has had only one police officer for a community of over 3,200 people.

The racing industry remains in crisis in Queensland, with the government trying to tax racing out of existence. There is a large racing industry in Condamine, with some of the biggest breeders of thoroughbreds on my doorstep. The point-of-consumption tax is higher than in New South Wales and Victoria, yet their governments are investing much more into the racing industry. Racing has many wider benefits, such as employment, creating small businesses and bringing rural and regional communities together for their one or two race meetings a year. This money is invested back into small communities. Small business confidence is at an all-time low under the Labor government. It has made it more difficult to conduct business by increasing red tape while introducing new taxes.

Queenslanders are paying too much for their electricity as a result of Labor's poor investment decisions. The gold-plating of transmission lines and fat profit margins being collected are the key drivers of power prices that have seen household electricity bills surging over 60 per cent above inflation over the past decade. When I attended the recent Queensland Day celebrations in Oakey I spoke with several older residents who told me that they cannot afford to turn on their heaters. Last Tuesday in Oakey saw the temperature reach only seven degrees Celsius. What are people living on pensions supposed to do with these out-of-control electricity prices?

Our agriculture industry underpins our economy, being worth \$20 billion annually. The electorate of Condamine is a prime example of this. There is everything from broadacre farming to intensively farmed irrigation areas growing grains, pulses and cotton to one of the largest intensive livestock industries in Australia and a diverse horticulture sector. For farmers, electricity prices have increased by 130 per cent over the past 10 years.

The budget will see cuts of staff from the department of agriculture and from Biosecurity Queensland at a time when we have the real risk of biosecurity breaches with animal activists trespassing on farms. Eighty-five staff will be lost with the closing of the Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges. This is the second consecutive year of staff cuts to the department, clearly demonstrating Labor's lack of commitment to agriculture. The response to the budget by AgForce CEO Mike Guerin was—

It is clear that Government doesn't value agriculture strongly enough nor understand its vital role in the economic, employment and social fabric of rural, regional and remote Australia.

He went on to say—

This government continues to demonstrate that it has no vision for the ongoing development and sustainability of broadacre agriculture ...

In conclusion, just when I thought it could not get any worse than last year's budget for rural and regional Queensland, this budget has beaten it by a country mile. It does nothing to encourage infrastructure investment, nothing to assist struggling families to pay their electricity bills, nothing to improve our economy and definitely nothing for agriculture.

Funding for three projects in the Condamine electorate was announced again, for the third year in a row: the ambulance station at Drayton, the upgrade of the Yarranlea substation and the upgrade of the QFES headquarters at Charlton. Still there is not a single survey peg in the vacant allotment at Drayton for the new ambulance station.

Unfortunately for the constituents of Condamine, roads remain in disrepair and safety is being compromised, schools are reaching capacity with no plan for any new infrastructure or land to be purchased, and water and electricity prices continue to rise. This Labor government has lost touch with the very people it was elected to represent. This Palaszczuk government is arrogant and out of touch. Only the LNP has a plan for the future of Queensland.