




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MIRANI

Record of Proceedings, 13 June 2019

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

 **Mr ANDREW** (Mirani—PHON) (1.18 am): I rise to speak on the 2019-20 state budget. It would seem that we are bleeding. Whether it is to do with tunnels or the Public Service, Queensland looks to be bleeding. It is a body that is left with half its blood, but it is trying to give itself a transfusion with its own blood to stay alive.

Firstly, I will commend and thank the taxpayers for giving the Queensland government the opportunity of funding a number of important new and continuing projects across my electorate of Mirani. The budget papers indicate that both state and federal contributions have been secured to begin the Walkerston bypass, an important project that has been delayed by both major parties for well over 40 years. I am sure the local community will be looking forward to the day that hundreds of heavy vehicles bound for the Bowen Basin are removed from the main street of town. Notably, a year or so ago a B-double rolled over right on the edge of the school kerbing. Luckily, it was before school finished for the day.

I must question why this budget needs to reannounce significant allocations for Eton Range and the Mackay bypass stage 1. These projects are nearing completion after previous election promises and several years of construction. I will concede that these projects have provided a solid amount of local employment. This being the case, new projects will be needed to sustain employment and retain skills and capability. The budget offers a scope of roadworks across the 63,000 square kilometres of my electorate that is underwhelming. I will give thanks for smaller allocations for several works on the Capricorn and Bruce highways and support for some of the rural roads in the upper Pioneer Valley. However, these roadworks are a proverbial drop in the very large bucket of need in the Mirani electorate. I am very disappointed—and I would suggest the member for Burdekin would share a similar view—about the May Downs to Clarke Creek road including a flood resilient bridge across the Isaac River. It is a real pity that this project has been delayed for another year.

I have a lot of dirt roads across my electorate. With the pending growth in the Bowen Basin, a construction start on Rookwood Weir and the renewables project set to begin in Marlborough and St Lawrence hinterland, the opportunity to better facilitate resident employees from the surrounding communities and boost tourism in general is lost through inaction and delay. Speaking of delays, Rookwood Weir, the project getting a start, will be a huge opportunity to expand agriculture in the lower Fitzroy. However, it is a shame that the present government appears unwilling at this time to put the shovel-ready Upper Connors Dam and pipeline project back on the agenda. The Connors Dam project actually started construction in 2012 until it was abruptly mothballed by the Newman LNP government. The Bowen Basin is in the midst of a new upswing and is set to provide decades of high-value foundation commercial customers. Additionally, there is widespread recognition that we need more water storages and agricultural development. Finishing the Upper Connors Dam would provide a superb battery five times larger than Rookwood to ensure that the Lower Fitzroy and the coalfields never suffer water insecurity again.

Speaking of matters security related, might I address the military expansion at Shoalwater Bay involving the Broadsound, Stanage Bay, Port Alma and Bajool. I do respectfully suggest that the Queensland government shows due regard to managing transition of land uses. The expanding footprint of the military reserves and explosives storage bunkers will involve the potential loss of prime grazing acreages and significant social displacement with a number of small rural communities. This budget offers little compensation or opportunities towards offsetting the pending loss of productive land. Might I suggest future budgets consider support for feedlots, high-value irrigated export cropping, expanding biofuels production and aquaculture but in doing so it should respect the continuing interest of the existing landowners. I certainly do not want city based bureaucrats callously handing out opportunities to multinationals that in turn will drain away profitability. That profit should go directly back into the pockets of the long-term local families and resident workforces of the dozens of local communities across the Mirani electorate.

This budget does little to offer cost-effective water and electricity, and sensible land and environmental management. I know we have the reef bill coming forward, and recently I spoke with some of the environmental minister's staff. We do have an opportunity, hopefully working with all the ministers, that might provide for farmers action towards reducing the cost of water and also reducing the cost of electricity, considering that the Teemurra Dam in my electorate only used four per cent of its water allocation last year. We did not have the gas to burn in the cogeneration. We also had reduced amounts of molasses to feed our cattle, and a lot of the farmers are suffering very badly because of that. The government is kidding itself that we have any future in pursuing agricultural opportunities unless illogical financial and legislative impediments that exist currently are sorted out immediately.

Speaking of regional opportunities, I seriously hope the government can get its act together and facilitate a plan to re-establish mining and environmental rehabilitation at Mount Morgan. This budget offers nothing to get the mine tours happening, nothing for the fireclay caverns to open for business, nor any measures or in-kind support for any attractions in this historic town. Queensland owes a debt of gratitude for the huge economic contributions the Mount Morgan community has made for over a hundred years and more. We should look back to that community and actually give them a hand. It is a shame that we have stemmed the tourist flow by shutting down any of the attractions they might have had.

At nearby Stanwell, I recognise the reinvestment in capital maintenance at the power station. Whilst many may well malign the fact it burns coal, the plant is still young and has decades of life remaining and will keep providing hundreds of jobs for constituents and businesses of all kinds across Mirani, Gregory and Callide as well as the ALP held seats of Rockhampton and nearby Keppel.

My seat is obviously huge, and the list of needs being answered by this budget is still a long way from getting a pass mark. In Sarina, whilst there is money granted in this budget towards the redevelopment of the hospital, it is most annoying that this important health facility has been treated like a football across numerous elections. As recently as last month, the federal ALP was promising to contribute towards the full \$43 million needed, but yet again Sarina misses out. This sort of rubbish has to stop. It is not fair that a genuine critical need exists but is subject to silly politics for over a decade.

Speaking of matters illogical, the budget offers nothing towards the Sarina community's request for pedestrian safety upgrades on the Anzac Street level crossing. The upgrades are the same as those put in place at the Central Street crossing. Over 600 kids use that crossing every week. There is a great risk. There are two different types of trains—locomotives and normal trains—and they go at different speeds, which places the kids at risk of being run over or hurt. We should do something about it such as installing safety fencing and automatic barrier gates to avoid the unnecessary tragedy of a group of schoolkids walking out in front of a Queensland Rail train or a Wilmar sugar tram whilst moving between campuses of the high school.

Talking about the school, I look forward to Sarina State High School finally getting a decent school hall, which will also double as an emergency shelter. However, like the hospital, I suspect the present government will seek to portray the small allocation as a start but will leave full funding to the mercy of future election outcomes. That hall is a very important part of the Sarina community not just for the actual high school itself but for the clusters that live around Sarina. At the moment everyone is having to drive to Mackay. That hall not only doubles as a place for the cluster schools to come—and I know the Minister for Education has put some money towards this. I know it will be good for the community going forward. It does not matter whether it is for an Anzac Day celebration or just to shelter people during a severe weather event.

Speaking of inclement weather events, much of my electorate is exposed to cyclones and big rain and storm events. Too often the coastal communities of Camilla, Koumala, Clairview, Ogmoo and Yaamba are first to suffer through unreliable electricity and loss of communications. This budget offers nothing of substance, although we do note that the Pandoan substation had some reclosures going in and some fault locators on the actual line. It is one of the longest lines and it is very problematic.

I now wish to reflect on the massive bushfires last November, when my electorate of Mirani was smack in the middle of the Central Queensland bushfires. Numerous fire grounds stretched from Dalrymple Heights and Eungella through to The Caves, Kabra and Alton Downs. The exact figure of how much ground was burnt out was about 200,000 square kilometres. It was huge, yet this budget offers very little to assist landowners recover from the lasting damage caused and, in many cases, the cost of fighting fires on state owned land. After personally visiting just about every fire ground over the two weeks, it was clear that rural volunteers and emergency services professionals, including QPS, that served at these events within my electorate were pure gold and they backed the community to no end. I am very proud of the way they performed their service. They were very professional. I certainly hope the solid recommendations and directions stemming from bushfire and other disaster recovery review panels are delivered shortly and that respective ministers have resourced the 2019-20 budget in expectation.

I harbour deep fears that summer 2019-20 will be equally as bad if not worse. To add my two bob's worth, I again mention the continued absence of a state contribution to improve Finch Hatton International Airport so that it is ready to serve as a runway for future water-bombing evacuation efforts. The hasty rebuild of the emergency strip last year enabled 350,000 kilograms of water to be dropped on the Eungella area fires. I refer to the efforts of the pilots and their dedicated ground crews who were able to turn the planes around every eight minutes. They were in and out. I visited and dropped off drinks and ice to them. They did an amazing job. They saved a lot of houses and a lot of community assets. In some of my communities, it is very likely that lives would have been lost without those people doing what they did. I hope we get some funding to ensure it continues.

Speaking of tragedies, I reflect on the tragedy of the Queensland ambulance officer in my electorate who lost control of his vehicle while responding to an emergency call-out. It was a very sad and terrible event. I met this person when I worked in the mines prior to my life now. Whilst not seeking to attribute the cause of this accident to an absence of such, I have taken advice from many across the communities of the Pioneer Valley who have since questioned why there is a shortage of officers and why the growing towns of Walkerston, Marian and Mirani do not have their own ambulance station. Putting a new combined QAS and QFES at Marian affords a quicker response time for over 10,000 people. When frequent road accidents occur along the Peak Downs Highway and parts of the Bruce Highway, this should happen.

As a member representing a rural and peri-urban electorate for the last 18 months, it is crystal clear that to me my seat comes up well short on education, health and many community services. My seat contains three high schools, two of which will be bursting at the seams within a few years. One certainly appreciates the upgrade of K block at Mirani State High School, but my calls to think ahead and secure land for a new high school in Ooralea were not answered in this year's budget. Thankfully, I put it on the horizon for next time. What is patently absurd from reading the minister's knockback letter and reading through the GW3 regional projects list is that this government plans to spend millions on roads around the already bloated Mackay State High School. How ridiculous to be planning to expand Mackay State High School by another 500 to 600 children when we could build a new school right beside the Mackay Ring Road, Central Queensland University, and make much better use of the brand-new aquatic and athletic facility.

My seat has the burgeoning Paget industrial estate positioned right across the road, and thousands of acres of prime land for residential housing with soon-to-be-improved access to the Bowen Basin. Literally, there are local jobs on the doorstep. Why must we put everything into the south-east and then see budget after budget shell out tens of billions more on tunnels and 10-lane motorways? In many ways, the money that funds this folly comes from regional Queensland. The environmental credentials of the present government must be questioned as way too much environmental damage is caused through expanding the south-east corner metropolis.

Might the next budget look more seriously at decentralising our population into the communities across my electorate of Mirani? Neighbouring Gregory and Mirani would gladly see more people move back to the regions. Bowen Basin mining is moving ahead. The Galilee Basin, as of a few hours ago, is a go. Furthermore, local tourism would do better if the cost-of-living issues were properly fixed, freeing up people's time to have weekends away. Reflecting on the budget, I feel the electors of Mirani are not getting their fair share. I do thank taxpayers for their contribution, and I thank the Labor government for handing down the budget.