




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

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MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Olive Downs Mine, Approval; Central Queensland, Health Services

 **Ms LAUGA** (Keppel—ALP) (2.44 pm): I rise to draw to the attention of the House today that the approval from the federal LNP government for the Olive Downs Coking Coal Project, a billion-dollar investment that will bring 500 construction jobs and 1,000 operational jobs to Central Queensland, is now 239 days overdue. The people of Central Queensland are desperate for jobs. It is a real shame that the federal government has been sitting on the approval for this metallurgical coalmine that is proposed by an Australian miner. Metallurgical coal is in such high demand for steel production in markets around the world. The federal Minister for the Environment, Sussan Ley, and her federal counterparts have been sitting on this approval for 239 days now, despite the fact that the Queensland Coordinator-General approved this project last year. As a direct result of the federal government dragging its feet on this project, these jobs are now in limbo.

The people of Central Queensland are sick and tired of the infighting happening at a federal level. It is very clear that the government is completely forgetting about their role, their responsibility to govern and to provide jobs for people in Central Queensland. It is clear that the LNP at a federal level are just too busy fighting against each other. They are stabbing each other in the back and talking about themselves. What they really need to do is concentrate on their job which is to get on with it and to sort these approvals that are now 239 days overdue. I am calling on the federal member for Capricornia to pick up the phone to talk to her federal counterpart, the Minister for the Environment, and ask to get these approvals sorted as soon as possible.

While I am on my feet, I would also like to draw to the attention of the House an ongoing problem for people in my community which is the exorbitant out-of-pocket costs that they are paying to visit the GP. People in Central Queensland are not going to the doctor when they are sick because they cannot afford to. The average person in Central Queensland is paying \$40 out of their own pocket to see a GP now. We are seeing declining numbers of fully bulk-billing GPs. Most GPs in Central Queensland only bulk-bill for pensioners; everyone else is paying the full fee to see a GP. In some cases we are hearing of fees in excess of \$70 and the patient receives back only \$38.

This problem exists not only with GPs but also with psychiatrists, psychologists and other medical professionals who provide support and treatment to people in the community when they are sick. I have been speaking with people such as Amanda who tells me it is costing in excess of \$500 per visit to see her psychiatrist. The Medicare rebate is only \$160. The amount of \$160 is not much in comparison to the \$500 that she has to spend to see the psychiatrist.

Kylie is seeing her psychologist at a cost of over \$200 per visit. She qualified for a federal government mental health care plan, yet receives a rebate of only \$120. I am really concerned about this. I particularly worry for the people who do not have \$200 in their bank account to see their psychologist and what that spiralling impact has on those people's health care. If they need to see a psychologist or a GP because they are unwell and then they do not and their condition worsens, it can

possibly end up in a hospital visit. When we are talking about a \$38 Medicare rebate at the moment, in comparison to the \$600 cost that is imposed on the taxpayer for a hospital visit, it makes good economic sense to support people to see their GP first and foremost.

We know through the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners that less than one in four GPs in Australia are bulk-billing all patients. It is not the doctors' fault. They have costs; they have to pay their staff and their overheads. They are merely charging what they need to in order to cover their costs. The federal government has, after many years, frozen the Medicare rebate. It is having a huge impact on people in my community, as well as on our hospitals and emergency departments.