




Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) (2020-2021) BILL

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 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (8.55 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill 2020. On Tuesday the Treasurer referred to strength, tenacity and goodwill in his opening remarks. Unfortunately, those qualities went missing from his speech from that point onwards.

There were a number of announcements for projects in my electorate that I have been fighting for over the duration of the last term. When we look at the Burdekin electorate and look at the agricultural production, horticulture and, more importantly, the resources sector and what they contribute to this state, we would think that the Treasurer and this government would be falling over themselves to keep that electorate going, to fund the infrastructure and the services that we so desperately need and that we have been crying out for for decades.

Sure, we have the Haughton River flood plain road project. This is a \$500 million project that we fought so long and hard for. That is starting to come to a conclusion. It will flood proof the Bruce Highway at the section near Giru that is a notorious trouble spot. I also welcome the announcement of funding for upgrades to Rugby Park at Ayr and the contribution to the Indigenous Land and Sea Ranger Program at Ayr. As a frequent visitor to the school, I welcome the funding for the multipurpose hall at Ayr State High School and, along with the multipurpose hall at Moranbah State High School, which I fought so long and hard for, I look forward to those facilities opening in the not-too-distant future.

Funding for the Drive IT NQ project is finally forthcoming from the state government. That is yet another project that I have advocated for over the longer term. In fact, it was during a local government campaign that I first gave my support to that project, along with the current Mayor of Townsville, Jenny Hill. Here we are, more than five years later, finally seeing that project come to fruition.

Moving south towards Bowen, I welcome continued works at the port at Abbot Point and the contribution towards the Salisbury Plains Industrial Precinct, as well as the works at the Bowen State High School. I have had a lot of discussions, a lot of meetings, with the Bowen Chamber of Commerce, the Bowen Collinsville Enterprise, CQ University and stakeholder groups in Bowen about the need to develop and deliver agriculture related training in this area with a view to providing a career path to students in the region. As a compassionate campaigner for better roads in regional Queensland, I also welcome works on the Bowen Developmental Road and the Peak Downs Highway as well as funding for much needed improvements at Clermont, Dysart and Moranbah state high schools.

That is all so far so good, but let us look at the detail and let us look at the projects that are missing. I will start at the northern end of the electorate of Burdekin. It is a fact that, in the last 18 years, the stretch of the Bruce Highway between Zinc Road and Cape Cleveland Road—a stretch of just 19 kilometres south of Townsville—has claimed 17 lives. I know, Mr Deputy Speaker Walker, that as the divisional councillor for that area, you are well aware of the danger of that particular section of highway.

It is a shame that the transport minister is no longer in the chamber because I challenge him to find a more dangerous section of the Bruce Highway along the entire length of it in this state. Here we are still waiting for the upgrades, still waiting for those works that are needed to make that section of highway safer. You only have to drive along that section of highway, Mr Deputy Speaker—and you know this full well—and see the white crosses dotted along it to truly appreciate just how dangerous it has become.

It is a fact that over 10 years ago plans for the southern corridor access road were developed. Yet, despite that fact, there is no money in this budget to make this stretch of road safer. The time for excuses in relation to that stretch of road has long passed. The attitude of this government towards ongoing fatalities and serious injuries is nothing short of disgraceful. I will not give up this fight. I am standing with the local residents and the motorists who use that section of highway on a daily basis, and I will continue to highlight this issue until it is fixed.

As we move down to the Burdekin district there is precious little in this budget to help keep that district alive. The Burdekin district needs diversification, and when it comes to industries and jobs there is no funding for the industrial estate that would have provided an opportunity to do just that.

I want to talk about the raising of the Burdekin Falls Dam, a project that has been on the drawing board for decades. This is a project that is ready to go. It is a project that has been talked about for decades and it is a project that North Queensland needs. The number of studies, investigations and the planning work that has gone into the expansion of this dam is now bordering on ridiculous, yet again we see money allocated in this budget for even more planning. I say that we should get the job done. Get the work started so we can create the jobs that we need and provide the water security that we so desperately need in the north of the state.

The town of Home Hill was completely overlooked yet again in this state budget. Here we have a town where the equipment to provide dialysis services is in place but patients still need to travel to Townsville. Despite the excuses and the rhetoric, it is very apparent that the issue is the availability of staff. That is an issue that remains unaddressed throughout the Burdekin electorate when it comes to health.

Heading down the highway to Bowen you see yet another missed opportunity. Along with the member for Nanango, during the campaign I had the pleasure of announcing funding for a space launch facility. Wouldn't that have been a great opportunity for North Queensland and a career path for those students—an opportunity to inspire students and create new industries. Instead, the countdown has stopped. In Bowen itself the funding for the CT scanning facility at the Bowen Hospital is finally available. Almost two years after the federal government committed to supplying the equipment this Labor government is finally progressing this project. In the meantime, thousands of people have made the four-hour round trip for medical services that city people take for granted. It is those health issues that continue all the way to Clermont in the south-west corner of my electorate.

All day today and tonight from those opposite I have heard about hospitals and health services and the need for improved services. They need to come and visit the Burdekin electorate, because in places like Clermont we have been waiting for a permanent doctor for years. It took me four years to get a second doctor at Collinsville. Communities like Dysart, where we have one doctor who starts at seven o'clock each morning and finishes at midnight six days a week, highlight the disparity between the provision of health services in the bush and the provision of health services enjoyed by our city cousins. The rural doctor crisis is real, and there is no better example of that than what is going on in places like Clermont—a community that has had to take matters into their own hands to find a solution.

I want to pay tribute here tonight to the work undertaken by the Clermont community, because they got together with the local resource company and local businesses and stumped up the money to try and pay for a doctor to come to that community. It is a disgrace that, in this state, that community had to put their hand in their pocket to pay the wages of a medical practitioner in their town. During the election campaign Clermont was one of the centres nominated for dialysis services. Like Home Hill, will it also see equipment installed with no associated staffing? That is just one question that needs to be answered.

Also in Clermont we see—and I quote from the regional action plan—'a commitment for a replacement police facility'. That is it. There is no allocation of funds for this much needed project, so on behalf of the Clermont community I ask this question of the Premier: will this police station be built during this term of government, or was that yet another empty promise by the Labor candidate during the recent election?

I mentioned earlier that I welcome works on the Peak Downs Highway. It is between Clermont and Moranbah that this work is scheduled to take place. It appears that the Treasurer has no idea that the Peak Downs Highway is 175 kilometres long and that Nebo is 100 kilometres from Moranbah. I

hope that is just the beginning of much needed improvements for what the locals colloquially call the 'goat track'. Just recently we saw yet another fatal accident on that stretch of highway.

Can I remind everyone in this place of the value of the resources that come out of Central Queensland? All we have ever asked for is our fair slice of the pie, yet to this day we still have roads like the Bowen Developmental Road, the May Downs Road and the Kilcummin Diamond Downs Road which are unsealed. We take that for granted when we are down here in the south-east corner and we talk about capacity and adding extra lanes. All we would like out in that country is a sealed road. When you are overtaking or being overtaken by road train triples on single-lane bridges, when the school bus run to Kilcummin State School is suspended because they can no longer drive the bus on the road to transport the kids to school, then you have a problem because that is putting at risk the education of those students.

As we head into Moranbah, a centre that contributes billions of dollars to the state coffers in royalties, it is about time the Treasurer explains why the now Deputy Premier committed to a business case for upgrading the Moranbah Hospital and why the Labor candidate said the upgrade would happen. Either way, the election has passed and of course yet again the promise has vanished. Not surprisingly, that promise also included a business case for the upgrading of the Bowen Hospital. That has also vanished.

If you head back towards the coast you pass through Collinsville, a town steeped in mining history. After a four-year fight that I was proud to lead, Collinsville recently welcomed their second doctor. That is great news, but if you live in Collinsville you had better hope that you do not need to be transferred to a tertiary hospital in Townsville or Mackay after dark. There is a very simple reason for that: the runway there needs to be upgraded to accommodate the larger RFDS planes. Would you not think that would have been a worthwhile project this government would have funded in the budget handed down this week: \$800,000 to extend the runway to allow RFDS planes to land in that community after dark.

I will move on to my shadow portfolios. Once again we have heard of extra police for Queensland, and once again most Queenslanders did their best not to laugh. The Treasurer talks about an extra 2,025 police personnel by 2025. The minister stood in this place earlier today waxing lyrical about these additional officers. However, as I often like to say, the best predictor of future performance is past performance, and when it comes to police recruitment this government has been found wanting. Let's cast our mind back to previous budgets and count the speeches in this place where Labor ministers talked about more police.

The 2019-20 budget promised an increase of three police officers compared to the actual figure for 2018-19. I guess any increase is a good thing, but what was the actual result? We did not get three extra officers or even one: we got 222 fewer police than what was promised in the budget, meaning that in 2019-20 we actually had 116 fewer police personnel than were budgeted for in 2018-19. Queenslanders are sick of crime. Townsville people are sick of crime.

Despite the COVID-19 restrictions, this year has been more deadly on Queensland roads than previous years. If this government is serious about addressing these issues they must deliver, because the time for talk is over.

In the area of fire and emergency services, one of our biggest issues is volunteers. Luckily for the government, the only mention of those generous, brave men and women is a referral to satisfaction levels. It will be interesting, to say the least, when we see the next survey of satisfaction levels, given the recent debacle surrounding both rural fire volunteers and our marine rescue volunteers. I think we can see the writing on the wall for that particular measure.

Perhaps the shadow portfolio that identifies best the priorities, or lack thereof, for this government is rural and regional affairs. As I have already outlined, within my electorate this is a budget that sadly misses the mark for regional Queensland. So many opportunities have been missed, so many promises have been made but not funded and so many services have seen little change, if any, to their funding. This government's ignorance of rural and regional Queensland is made even sadder given the sixfold increase in borrowings in the budget compared to election commitments. This is a budget of missed opportunities, of borrowing more than promised and then delivering less than we need. It is another missed opportunity for Queensland at a time when we need jobs and shovels in the ground.

(Time expired)