




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BROADWATER

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APPROPRIATION (COVID-19) BILL

 **Mr CRISAFULLI** (Broadwater—LNP) (4.12 pm): I also rise to make a contribution in the debate on the appropriation bill, which we will be supporting. First and foremost, before I discuss what I believe are the key elements of this bill, I have to place on record that this is indeed a health crisis. Everything we do must be viewed through the prism that this has already cost six Queenslanders their lives. Over 1,024 people have had to go through and endure the hardship of being diagnosed. Even those who have recovered have had some form of sacrifice—missing things for their loved ones and going through the emotional roller-coaster—as has every Queenslander in every way: Everyone who has missed a birthday of a loved one; Everyone who has not been able to go to their workplace in the manner they would like to; People who have not been able to show up at a funeral and say goodbye to their loved ones—loved ones who are incredibly close to them.

I have remained as positive as I can during this process because that is what Queenslanders want from us. The idea behind a national cabinet is that it is exactly for that reason. There are things I will raise today that I believe can be improved and that I would like to see the government adopt. I believe that we probably could have embarked on a stimulus package more swiftly. I believe that there were some flaws in the \$27 million rescue package which predominantly went to tourism entities. At the time, I believed businesses needed more assistance than just marketing, but in a crisis like this I acknowledge that we have to respond as best we can.

I acknowledge, as the member for Surfers Paradise and the Leader of the Opposition did, that we remain the only state that has not embarked on a small business grant program. The grant programs we have seen of up to \$10,000 could give businesses confidence as they look over their shoulder, with the wolf at the door, and be what they need to tide them over. I acknowledge, though, that the government has decided to look at a loan structure in the form of QRIDA. The comments I will make will be focused on that.

I believe—and the last 48 hours have convinced me of this—that the mechanics for this loan program are broken and need to be improved. Businesses are discovering how very broken it is. Let me explain why. Within the last fortnight applicants for this fund were told that they had until 25 September to lodge their applications. Within the last week we have a situation where we have two classes of applicants. If people lodged their application before a set date they would be assessed prior to 1 April. If they lodged after that date it would be into May if funds were still available. Just this week we have been told there will be no more applications for this fund.

That is just not right. There is no criteria in the universe that says first in, first served. This is about helping them stay afloat. It is about helping people keep staff on. It is about keeping the lights on at a terrible time. If the government believe that those who were in first are most worthy, then they must expand the fund because otherwise they will create different classes of applicants not based on the quality of the application.

I will give members two real-life examples. The first is a small tourism operator in North Queensland who had a staff member work for a week just to make sure they got this application right. The staff member was dealing with having to stand down people who were new to the organisation.

They could not provide hours and could not provide certainty. The staff member was homeschooling a child, all the while trying to provide the best application to give the company she works for the best chance of staying alive. They engaged accountants. They had to do directors' tax returns. They have not yet received their bill from the accountant but they believe it will be about \$3,000. At a time when this business has lost about 80 per cent of its revenue, let me tell members what \$3,000 would feel like to them right now.

The second real-life example was raised with me today by the member for Bonney. It involves a constituent of his. His business is down 100 per cent—nothing. He said he was going to do it properly because the application he was going to lodge was going to show just how desperate things were for him. It was also going to show that his business was credible and viable, and if he could get through this time at the other end he had a raft of contracts waiting to go. He could not lodge his application, and his crime was to want to do an application properly to leave no stone unturned.

Accountants across this state have told their clients, 'Don't rush this. Dot your i's and cross your t's,' because that is the way applications normally work. Those who have done that have been penalised. That is not a fair application process. Whilst I would rather have seen a grants system, I accept the government has made a decision to embark on a loan process, but it is a cruel hoax if people cannot access the loans and cannot be judged fairly.

Here are the three options for the government: option 1—do nothing, allow the first wave to get the money and stand beside some people who will be worthy recipients and say, 'Here it is'; option 2—allow those people who have made an application or who are in the process of making an application to vie for the remaining funds on a needs basis and who is the most qualified to get the best benefit; option 3—expand the quantum of the scheme and allow more time and more people to benefit from it. Option 2 is preferable. Option 2 is acceptable. Option 1 is unconscionable. To not be willing to give ground when the government will have a tsunami of criticism coming their way, as we saw with the proposed tenancy reforms—and we will discuss those later. There will be an avalanche of anger coming their way and for good reason because it has been ham-fisted. Nowhere else is there a situation where you set up a system, you tell people they have until deep into September, and then you keep pulling things back. That is a cruel hoax.

I am going to make a quick comment regarding my two shadow portfolios—tourism and the environment. Tourism has been hit harder than just about anything else. We know that the industry was already doing it tough in Queensland. There are those who seek to use figures in a way that, quite frankly, are not fair. Queensland has been losing market share and we have been losing it for some time. We have a resilient industry and they will reinvent themselves, but it will look a lot different and they will need all the help they can get. That is why right now they need the opportunity to apply for an expanded scheme the likes of which I have spoken about. Perhaps the environmental sector could help lead in getting some people back to work quickly. There are many good environmental projects that we could embark on swiftly to put people to work and create a legacy of good public open spaces and better natural reserves that we can all benefit from.

There will be much public debate in the months ahead about lifting the restrictions—when and how and whether different regions should ease restrictions before others. This bill will assist in keeping the economy on life support while we support lives. For that reason I support it. Parliament must continue to meet because we must debate a way out of this crisis. Long after we emerge from these troubling times we need a better way. We need to ensure that this state leads the economic recovery of this nation and that this nation leads the economic recovery of the globe. Our priority, first and foremost, is to assist everyone here right now in their hour of need and in the years to come to be the parliament that gets Queensland working again.