



Speech By  
**James Lister**


**MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS**

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**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) (2020-2021) BILL**

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 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (11.31 pm): I rise to speak on the cognate debate for the money bills for this year. I would first like to speak in the context of my electorate of Southern Downs. I try to always speak on behalf of my electors and talk about the things that are important to them. There are some good features of this budget which I am happy to acknowledge. I have been campaigning for a divided carriageway at the dangerous Eight Mile intersection for quite some time and I thank the state government for coming together with the federal government to approve that project.

Warwick State High School will be receiving \$5 million towards a new school hall. I know the principal, Joy Craig, and her staff and students will be very pleased about that. Girraween National Park will receive funds for improvements to the campground. Girraween National Park is a wonderful asset to the Southern Downs. Anybody who has visited the Granite Belt and decided to camp there has had a great time and I encourage everyone to do so. The state government has approved funds for planning for the safety of the Coolmunda Dam. I will have more to say on that further in my contribution. There has also been funding for the Southern Downs Regional Council to embark on a recycling scheme to improve water availability to industry. Many jobs in Warwick depend on large supplies of water, such as the meatworks. There has also been funding for a kerbside recycling system.

Some of these things have already been announced, but it does not mean that they are not valued and welcome. However, I do have very significant concerns about other aspects of the budget. When one travels the roads of Southern Downs as I do, I do about 60,000 kilometres a year, it is apparent that the roads desperately need attention. There are three particular instances of poor roads which have failed to receive adequate attention from this government for many years.

First of all there is Cunninghams Gap. This is an issue that has been expressed to the state government by myself and also by the Southern Downs Regional Council. Whenever Cunninghams Gap is closed because of a fire, flood or a landslip those businesses that depend on the traffic across Cunninghams Gap all the way through to Warwick suffer because there is no reason at all to go on the Cunningham Highway from Warwick if Cunninghams Gap is closed. The Fisher Park Road House operated by Frank and Jenny suffers. The Bestbrook Mountain Resort operated by my great constituent Ray Vincent and his family suffers. The Maryvale Hotel suffers. These businesses suffer when Cunninghams Gap is closed. We need more money spent on Cunninghams Gap to ensure that it is not closed every time there is a fire or it rains.

The Cunningham and Gore highways are matters I have raised at length in the House in the past. The Cunningham Highway, in particular between Goondiwindi and Yelarban, has undulations on it which are frightening. An ordinary family car can become airborne at the speed limit along there. Imagine trying to operate a trucking business or driving your own truck across these undulations. It is very tough on the suspension. It adds to the cost of doing business in our neck of the woods. The Gore Highway between Goondiwindi and Millmerran is similar to that across the Wyaga Creek crossings.

Where Wyaga Creek spreads across there are many undulations that many people, in particular trucking operators and drivers, complain about. These are safety issues. I know there are difficulties with the substrata, that the water flow does make it difficult for the road to be stabilised, but something must be done about it because lives are at stake. We deserve to have safe roads in Southern Downs.

We have heard about the cutbacks in research in the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries which have occurred as a result of the current budget. I made an election commitment, with the agreement of the LNP opposition, to provide a wine industry extension officer based at the Applethorpe DAF facility which was going to be a great driver for the wonderful wine tourism industry that we have on the Granite Belt. I would love to have seen that matched by the government, but we see no commitment to that kind of research. I am worried that this government will allow the Applethorpe DAF facility to wither on the vine. I will do my very best to make sure that that does not happen.

It is well known in my neck of the woods that the department of natural resources, mines and energy took a very heavy-handed approach to some of the hardworking irrigators and dairy farmers in the Gladfield region to the east of Warwick. About 18 months ago, with negative three days notice, the department issued to many of these irrigators a notice to say that until they installed a water meter on their bore, their allocation will be cut by 80 per cent and they can only irrigate at very restricted times. This was in the middle of a period where farmers were growing lucerne and onions and irrigating pasture for cows and other animals. It was a disgraceful episode.

We did manage to achieve a withdrawal of those notices by fighting hard in meetings with the department. I thank Ross Bartley, the deputy mayor of the Southern Downs Regional Council, along with Lawrence Ryan, one of the dairy farmers, for their hard work to bring that injustice to the attention of the government and make sure that it was reversed. Those farmers have had notices issued to them again and they are required to purchase very expensive water meters. It is not something that drought-stricken farmers are in an advantageous position to do. I do not see any emphasis on helping those who are producing the food and the fibre that we rely on to comply with changing government requirements. I would like to see more emphasis on that.

We have heard a great deal about COVID-19 but not so much about the effects on local governments which have had to contend with COVID-19 and implement measures to support the government's response to COVID. The Southern Downs Regional Council advises me that it is almost \$300,000 out of pocket thanks to COVID and their support for the measures to contain it and close the borders. The Goondiwindi Regional Council has also laid out a fair bit of money, about \$60,000 I was told this morning by Mayor Lawrence Springborg. I urge the government to budget to repay these moneys to these local government entities. Their funding sources and their structural support financially are very narrow. They have a small rates base and they do a great deal of good for their communities. To take that sort of money out of the budget of a small council really hurts. I do not think it is fair that state government measures for which they are responsible should be funded by constrained local governments.

This particular budget is a virtuoso demonstration of Labor's propensity to borrow money. No-one that I am aware of is disagreeing with the idea that during times of economic downturn one borrows, because that is a chance to stimulate the economy and invest in the things that will give a return in the years to come. We have heard a number of speakers on my side point out that the borrowings that this government is making are not going exclusively to investing in income-producing assets and things that are going to make the value of the state greater in the long run.

We are seeing borrowings used to fund recurrent expenditure and that is happening because of Labor's long mismanagement of the economy. We have heard speakers before me talk in great detail about how, during the Bligh years, this state was set up for failure. We had a government that was profligate with its spending. It sold assets after going to an election explicitly saying that it would not sell assets. As has been said, the Premier, the Treasurer and the Minister for Police and Corrective Services and Minister for Fire and Emergency Services were part of the Bligh government and sat around its cabinet table. In the House today are ministers who were complicit in the sale of assets, contrary to the wishes of the Queensland people and without an electoral mandate to do so.

**Mr Hart:** \$16½ billion.

**Mr LISTER:** \$16½ billion; I take the interjection from my honourable friend. Where did that money go? It was frittered away. Even after raiding public servants' superannuation, increasing taxes and trying to extract money from dividends from the government owned corporations that had not been sold, the government still managed to increase debt. I heard my honourable friend the member for Clayfield excoriate the government over their past form in the financial management of this state with asset sales, increasing debt and so forth. Losing our AAA credit rating was the beginning of the end of Queensland being the shining light of economics in our Federation.

Now we have COVID and, because the government has large debts and large spending commitments, it is not able to cope with a downturn without borrowing to fund recurrent expenditure, which is a very concerning thing. I do not see a great deal of that money being spent in my electorate. My kids know—and I am sure I can speak confidently for their kids and their grandkids—that it is not a good thing to burden future generations with debt for which there is no lasting value. Labor's approach is always to measure their success by how much they spend and by how many announcements they are making, but seldom do they focus on outcomes. With record expenditure we hear speaker after speaker on the government side talk about record spending on this, there being so much money for this and so much money for that, but we never hear about the outcomes.

In terms of education, in 2019 we went backwards in half of the NAPLAN categories. We were below the national average in every year group for every subject, even though the government had been embarking on record expenditure in education. It is a similar story with health. When the LNP lost government at the beginning of 2015, there were 30,000 people on the hospital waiting lists. As of February 2020, before COVID, the waiting list was at 56,000, which represents an 86 per cent increase in the number of those waiting for surgery. Of course, we have heard about ambulance ramping, which is a crippling impost on the Health budget. It does not in any way serve the population well when it comes to getting treatment and emergency care.

We have seen more and more money spent on police. There are more gadgets, increased police numbers and bigger budgets, but crime is up because the government will not pass the laws that give the police the powers they need to deal with crime. We let out the same scallywags, day after day. Members should talk to the people of Goondiwindi who have had their cars stolen and their houses broken into and who have been assaulted. They are sick of the petty crime and the antisocial behaviour. The staff at the Goondiwindi Regional Council are extremely proud of the grounds and the fixtures in Goondiwindi, but they see them vandalised night after night by the same offenders, who are well known to the police but cannot be held. That is a great disservice to the community of Goondiwindi. It is a blight on what is an otherwise extremely livable and fabulous community.

In his speech the opposition leader, David Crisafulli, made some very good observations. In particular I agree with his assertion that the attacks on farmers and on the bush must end. In an earlier debate I heard Labor members talk about emergency water infrastructure rebates. They blamed the federal government for their failure. As someone who represents people who depend on those rebates, I know that the failure rested entirely with the Labor government. The system was mismanaged and the inference was definitely open that the government simply did not want to chip in its share. It wanted to clip the ticket for administering the scheme but not give hardworking primary producers, who needed support, the funding that they required.

The closure of agricultural colleges was a disgraceful low point in this government's relationship with the bush. Referring to the *Queensland Country Life* of 6 December 2019, I note that Minister Mark Furner had such poor judgement that he allowed himself to be photographed actually closing the Longreach agricultural college.

**Mr Millar:** I saw it myself.

**Mr LISTER:** I take that interjection from my honourable friend the member for Gregory, as that was in his electorate. I table that for the benefit of the House to forever condemn the minister for being responsible for putting the final nail in the coffin of agricultural training in this state.

*Tabled paper:* Extract, dated 6 December 2019, from the Facebook page of Ms Sally Gall, titled 'Ag Minister Furner visits empty college campuses on final day' [356](#).

That matter aroused great condemnation and dismay amongst the good and true folk of the Southern Downs, many of whom are proud graduates of those colleges. Where will our kids get the hands-on training that they need to become the operators of primary producing businesses in years to come? We hear a lot about education and training. Do not let it be said that Labor does not close schools. Labor closed two agricultural training colleges, to their eternal shame.

They are pulling down Paradise Dam. How can a government that says it supports the bush possibly look farmers in the eye when they do something like that? I heard my honourable friend the member for Condamine speak about the Acland mine. How disgraceful it is that a government would say that they cannot allow the mine to go ahead while it is under appeal, yet when they felt they were under attack electorally following the federal election the Premier raced out to break that very rule. Suddenly she abandoned the black-throated finches.

*(Time expired)*