




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MACKAY

Record of Proceedings, 4 December 2020

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) (2020-2021) BILL

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 **Mrs GILBERT** (Mackay—ALP) (4.06 pm): I rise to speak on the appropriation bills 2020. I want to congratulate Premier Palaszczuk, Treasurer Cameron Dick and the cabinet for delivering a budget that supports regional Queensland. Because of the Palaszczuk government's strong response to COVID-19, my region has been able to keep our industries in operation. Our coalmines have stayed open, unlike mines in some countries overseas. Our cane industry has begun and nearly completed the 2020 sugar crush. Our engineering businesses at Paget have been busy filling contracts in the mining industry and manufacturing orders. These businesses employ Queenslanders and keep the Queensland economy moving.

The Palaszczuk government has been investing in manufacturing since we were elected. We have created opportunities right across Queensland. My electorate will be the site of one of Queensland's newest rollouts of manufacturing hubs, a \$2 million injection focusing on the manufacturing of biofutures made from crops and protein grown within the region. The primary producers in my region have the potential to partner with many manufacturers to turn their produce into value added commodities. The Palaszczuk government will also invest a further \$1 million to deliver a business case to potentially make the Mackay, Isaac and Whitsundays region a hub for future foods and bioplastics.

A biohub will value-add to our existing agricultural industries and sector by diversifying the customer base, creating a higher value use for produce and reducing levels of produce waste. Mackay and the Whitsundays would be a world-leading biohub for new foods and new food products. Agriculture supports thousands of jobs and is the cornerstone of our economy, but we must look to new foods and new products to safeguard jobs in this industry. For example, our region is renowned for producing high-quality cane. By partnering with the private sector, we could be a global producer of bioplastics and other products.

Future foods is also emerging as a global, multibillion dollar industry. We believe we have found the ideal location for a Queensland biohub to create new food and food products and enter new export markets—right here in Mackay. This will not compete with traditional, animal based protein products, but complement the rich and strong farming history of this region. The government is now working to identify and partner with potential industry investors, innovators and commercial operators who have the capability to deliver in this space. Plant based alternative foods and products like bioplastics that are made out of food waste have the potential to create thousands of jobs in this region. A Mackay future foods biohub will provide another exciting opportunity for our food production and processing sectors.

A University of Queensland researcher is looking to turn sugarcane waste into face masks and other PPE clothing for health workers on the frontline against COVID-19. Dr Nasim Amiralian has been awarded a \$300,000 Advance Queensland COVID-19 Industry Research Fellowship to develop antiviral nanofibres that can be used to provide greater protection to the face masks, medical gowns and other clothing used by health workers. All this will be made out of sugarcane.

The Deputy Speaker has reviewed and approved my speech for incorporation. As such, I ask that the remainder of my speech be incorporated in the *Record of Proceedings*.

The speech read as follows—

Hannah from Ocean International Hotel, and Carmel from Saige and Sohl ladies fashion and shoe store are just two of the 618 businesses that have accessed a Small Business Adaption Grant; \$5.5 million has been delivered to the Mackay-Whitsunday Region to help businesses through the COVID-19 disruption and adapt their businesses for a different way of doing business. Both businesses used their grants to go digital. They are value adding to their profit by doing business online as well as keeping their traditional business base in operation.

In relation to health, COVID-19 has had an impact on community mental health. Mackay's Step up Step Down facility which opened last year has been well used. People have told me their personal stories of how the facility has kept them out of hospital. The \$500,000 refurbishment of Mackay Community Mental Health provides a safe clinical environment for clients that also protects their privacy. This is part of a \$6 million upgrade that is timely to boost mental health services during the pandemic.

Turning to education, all students need to have access to quality education regardless of their economic background. Education is a leveller. It is a passport to a young person's future. It can open the doors to a range of exciting possibilities for career choices. To have quality education schools need to have programs and working conditions that will attract new teachers into the profession. The Great Teachers Great Future program will see new teachers and teacher aides employed. The Mackay Whitsunday region has seen an increase of 5.8 per cent of additional teachers. The program will invest nearly \$20 million to set up a Turn to Teaching paid internship program to attract aspiring teachers from other fields of work. These new teachers will add to our excellent teaching pool and continue to meet important teacher student ratios, keeping our teaching and learning conditions in classroom at a highest standard. Students need up-to-date modern teaching areas. Pioneers SHS students excitedly showed me the spaces where they are getting upgrades to their science and robotic laboratories of nearly \$1 million. Some of the other upgrades include an external repaint of Victoria Park SS, funding to provide equitable access to core learning areas and a refurbished administration block; Fitzgerald SS will refurbish block 2; and there are another 14 schools receiving maintenance upgrades. I am also pleased to report that the Mackay schools breakfast programs have been funded to continue to provide a service to ensure students wellbeing.

In relation to employment and training, not all students and adults are looking for a university degree, they are more suited to working in trades. Today's tradespeople are highly qualified and skilled. Our training facilities need to keep pace with the ever changing demands from employer groups to meet demand. When I engage with the engineer sector in my region they tell me how their businesses are evolving to keep up with modern demands. Their machinery is changing. I have seen robotic welders in operation at Paget businesses. The world of trades is an exciting place and in high demand. That is why we are extending our free TAFE for under 21s to under 25s. Central Queensland is experiencing a trades shortage. Small and large businesses are wanting to put on more apprentices. This boost gives businesses the confidence to engage additional apprentices. I am excited \$7.5 million will expand heavy automotive facilities at the Mackay Ooralea Trade Training Centre at CQU. Mackay is a service centre for the Bowen Basin. Mining companies and contractors need training facilities in Mackay. Previously apprentices in heavy automobiles needed to travel to other centres after their first year to complete their training. Having training close to where apprentices live will reduce the cost of training and put less stress on apprentices needing accommodation away from home. Making it easier to access training will increase the rates of retention and completion qualification.

My region has seen the success of centres of excellence producing high-level training to support local development and industry. The Mackay Resource Centre of Excellence was delivered as a 2017 election commitment to the Mackay electorate. The concept was so innovative, the Mackay Regional Council jumped on board to add additional funding to make the centre a true centrepiece of innovation for the mining and also sugar industries for training and research and development. The \$3.4 million new agriculture centre of excellence to be established at Bowen TAFE and the new \$2 million aquaculture training centre to be established at Cannonvale TAFE will cater for the combined Mackay Isaac Whitsunday region. Our young people and mature workers wanting to gain new skills or upgrade can stay in our region. These combined centres of excellence give our region's residents future career choices. They back in the industries of our region to give them the confidence to expand and grow knowing that training in the region will meet future demands as their industries grow.

For many reasons some people find themselves in a situation where they have no work history or skills that would get them into paid employment. Skilling Queenslanders for Work funds skills development, training and job opportunities for disadvantaged Queenslanders through a suite of targeted skills and training programs. Seventy-three per cent of participants find work, take on further training or return to school around 12 months after exiting a program. Often graduation ceremonies in Mackay have had to be cancelled because participants are all employed and cannot get time off work to attend. Another 140 Mackay-Whitsunday locals are set to benefit from the next round of the Skilling Queenslanders for Work program. The programs will include Innovative Disability Employment; Mackay's PCYC "Get Set for Work"; Energy Skills Queensland's "Career Start Rail Skills". These graduates will possibly go onto build the train tracks or drive the trains to be made in Maryborough.

For the economy to grow and expand we need to have a good transport supply chain. We have built the Mackay Ring Road stage 1. It is great to see freight and sugar trucks out of the centre of town. The road also delivers the workers from the northside of Mackay to Paget faster and safer on a direct route to work. \$45 million for the Bruce Highway North Access upgrade being delivered jointly with the Federal Government is delivering additional lanes to connect the old Bruce Highway to the Ring Road, also easing congestion of the intersection of the Mackay Bucasia Road. Walkerston bypass is the next piece of road to upgrade the Bowen Basin pit to port supply chain. The road will also deliver a safer road network for the people of Walkerston. The tender applications are out and weather permitting work will start early 2021. It will be great to see more locals working on more local road projects.

The Great Barrier Reef Arena precinct is a project that is supported by a \$10 million contribution to the \$24 million final costing. The project will not only build the arena that will attract major cricket and AFL games, the arena will cater to large concerts that Mackay has reputation for being able to attract. The venue will deliver the capacity for live televised events and professional level player dressing, medical and coaching facilities. Mackay has already hosted Big Bash games attracting larger crowds than those in Brisbane. Imagine what we can achieve with upgraded facilities. Our accommodation places, restaurants and retail will benefit from the travellers from across Queensland that will attend the events. While in Mackay visitors will be able to enjoy our local islands. Cruise company Pure Escape will introduce a new full-day tour to nearby Cockermouth Island in the South Cumberland islands group. We're partnering with Pure Escape to deliver new attractions that will boost our tourism industry and create local jobs. This project will offer tourists an exceptional all-inclusive, eco-friendly day tour on the company's 17-metre custom-built catamaran to view these hidden treasures off the coast of Mackay. The project is estimated to add 5,600 tourists and approximately \$1.9 million into the local economy.

Locals and visitors love to fish in our region. Fish stock have increased since we introduced the Seaforth net free zone. Locals and visitors like to get out on the water. The \$700,000 upgrade to the River Street Boat ramp will make it easier and safer for boaties to get out on the water. Tourist and visitors to our region are attracted to our outdoor living and activities. The amount of \$500,000 to Mackay Regional Council will go towards the planning and development of the Pioneer Valley Mountain Bike Trail. This bike trail will attract more visitors to our region.

This budget is forward planning for Mackay and its regions. It has kept the Mackay economy moving. It supports training and apprenticeships. It has vision to develop new industries for our region diversifying our current industries. This budget delivers for regional Queensland. I commend the bill to the house.