




Speech By
Patrick Weir

MEMBER FOR CONDAMINE

Record of Proceedings, 3 December 2020

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) (2020-2021) BILL

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 **Mr WEIR** (Condamine—LNP) (11.10 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the appropriation bill 2020. The long-awaited budget was finally delivered by the Treasurer, Hon. Cameron Dick, on 1 December, and what a budget it is! It will go down in history as the biggest 'nothing' budget of a Labor government ever delivered in this state, worse than Goss, Beattie and Bligh all added together. At a time when Queensland needed a budget full of infrastructure projects, this government has provided precious little in the line of major projects to simulate our economy and get our state back up and running after a shutdown that has left small business, big business, tourism and the regions in tatters.

One month ago the Treasurer was going to borrow \$4 billion. Suddenly, yesterday that ballooned out to \$28 billion. Remember, this is additional borrowings—on top of what the Queensland state government has already borrowed. Eventually it will need to be repaid, as all debts do. The Treasurer and Premier will be long gone then, leaving a debt that our grandchildren will have to contend with. There will be nothing of note to show where all this money has gone. In four years our debt is expected to exceed \$130 billion, a staggering amount of money. As we all in this chamber know, the debt level in Queensland was horrendous a long time before the advent of COVID-19. The government is using this devastating virus as an excuse to cover for its poor economic management of Queensland over a long period of time.

As always, I scoured the budget papers to see what spending had been allocated for the seat of Condamine. As usual, this was a task that did not take long. Firstly, let me share what I did find and then I will speak of those things that were not included. This budget announced funding for three school halls in the Condamine electorate—significant announcements for those high schools at Oakey, Pittsworth and Clifton. The spend will be over three to four years at Clifton and Pittsworth. I am not sure what that means. Does that mean it will be a work site for three to four years, with tradesmen coming and going, or does that mean in the first year one wall will go up, the next wall will go up in the year after and so on? To date, the Oakey State High School does not have a timeline indicated, so hopefully work will start in the very near future. These halls are badly needed and will be welcomed by parents, students and staff alike.

There is funding for additional classrooms at the Wyreema school, refurbishments at the Oakey high school and an outdoor learning area at Gowrie school. The Quinalow Prep-10 State School will receive \$300,000 to replace its septic system—not glamorous but necessary. I would have thought a septic system would be part of the ongoing maintenance and normal upgrade of a government owned asset. There was so little in the Condamine section of the glossy *Delivering for the Darling Downs* brochure that they had to include a septic tank at a small bush school!

In the 2017-18 budget, an upgrade of the Charlton fire and rescue regional headquarters was announced—\$630,000 out of a total spend of \$750,000. Then in the 2018-19 budget, another upgrade was announced—\$3 million out of a \$10.6 million total spend. Then in the 2019-20 budget, there was

\$11 million out of a \$17 million spend for the replacement of the regional QFES HQ and a new fire and rescue station. Now in this budget we have \$16 million out of an \$18.4 million spend to continue the replacement. I am pleased to say that in February 2020 major construction works commenced. It is very similar to a new ambulance station that was announced at Drayton in the 2017-18 budget, with a total spend of \$4 million in the following two budgets, increasing the total spend to \$4.6 million. Finally, just prior to the election being announced the station was operational. It took a number of years, but it finally got there after four budgets. This is the sum total for Condamine.

Let's now talk about the things that I was hoping to see included. I notice that the member for Logan is back, because the chatter has started again. I have been calling for more police officers and infrastructure in many of the communities in the Condamine electorate. We have some areas with fast-growing populations, and the current police officers are stretched to the limit doing their job. There is nothing in the budget for a second police officer at Cambooya and nothing about extra police support at Goombungee to service Kingsthorpe and Gowrie Junction, although I am pleased to say that the Oakey station recently received a long-sought-after second patrol car, even if it was not fitted out for active duty upon arrival. Members would have heard my calls for this second patrol vehicle, as we have had the absurd situation of seven police officers sharing one patrol car for as long as I have been a member in this place.

Since I have been the member for Condamine, I have called on the Premier and the minister for natural resources and mines to give the Acland mine approval for stage 3. This is a shovel-ready project that would employ over 650 new workers within 18 months and inject millions into the Queensland economy. It is long overdue for approval, after 13 years of jumping through state government hoops and legal battles. If this government's mantra is about creating jobs, as it continually says it is, it needs to get this project happening. Last Friday, another 70 workers were laid off. I spoke to a number of them to wish them well and to promise them that I would do all in my power to ensure their remaining colleagues do not suffer the same fate. After the minister's response to a question without notice this morning I do not feel very confident for their future, yet we are told that this is a jobs budget—unless of course you work at Acland mine.

For the past two years I have been asking the government to investigate the need for a secondary school in the south-west corridor of the Toowoomba Regional Council area. In late 2019 the Queensland Schools Planning Reference Council identified that by 2031 one new secondary school may be required in the area. It recommended planning and developing a business case for this new school to assess future education demands. I was very disappointed to see that no funds have been allocated in this budget for a business case. The LNP made a commitment that if we won government we would fund a business case. The people in this area are crying out for a secondary school due to the rapidly growing population in the south-west corridor, particularly in terms of families with young children moving into more affordable areas such as Wyreema, Drayton, Westbrook and Cambooya.

Recently, I became aware of a review of the capital assets of the Darling Downs Health and Hospital Service. The review was conducted to investigate what assets required replacement or refurbishment. The review found that the aged-care and hospital facility at Oakey needed to be completely replaced at an approximate cost of \$30 million. It is currently an 80-bed facility with 72 aged-care beds and eight acute beds. The layout of the building is not ideal, with two wings for the aged-care section and the middle being the emergency hospital area. This was particularly challenging during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost half of the aged-care beds are in rooms with four people per room and a shared bathroom, with the remaining rooms being single or double rooms. The new standards for aged-care facilities are one person per room with an ensuite. I will be advocating for this facility to be replaced as soon as is feasibly possible to ensure the ongoing care for the aged community of Oakey.

In the lead-up to the election we saw the Premier and the former natural resources minister, Anthony Lynham, travel to Toowoomba to meet with the Toowoomba Regional Council to announce that they would be investigating building a pipeline to deliver water to Warwick and outlying towns along the route. There is no mention of even a feasibility study for this project. The Premier may have lost interest in this project after the election loss of the Labor candidate in Toowoomba North, but I can assure the government that the need still exists. We have the unacceptable situation of water being trucked into the town of Cambooya and, worse still, in the town of Clifton water is being trucked in and sewage is being trucked out. There needs to be a full review into the water security of the Toowoomba region. This is one of the fastest growing regions in the state and this is putting increasing pressure on our water future. This is compounded by the fact that there is an estimated \$200 million to be spent on the spillways of the existing dams. This is beyond the capacity of the local government to fund and the state needs to step in and work towards a solution with council.

I searched through the road funding commitments and there was not one mention of any road funding in the entire seat of Condamine. Given the poor state of some of these roads, that is more than disappointing. I have made representations for a number of these roads—the Clifton Leyburn Road for example. I travelled this road in the local school bus and it is nothing short of dangerous. I wrote to the minister to express my concern, and do members know what the response was? There were signs placed on the road saying 'rough surface' and the speed limit reduced. That was all the action that was taken. This is not the only road that this has happened to. This is becoming commonplace throughout Condamine.

We see the Palaszczuk government borrowing an enormous amount of money at a time when Queensland's revenue base is falling. In 2019-20 the three key revenue areas of GST, royalties and taxation all had decreases of between 3.7 per cent and 8.9 per cent. From the budget papers the general government sector revenue in 2020-21 is estimated to be \$56.24 billion, a decline of \$1.5 billion or 2.6 per cent. Yes, some of these decreases reflect the ongoing COVID-19 impacts on our state, nation and the entire world. There are, however, other impacts which include the expected 43 per cent reduction in royalty and land rent collections and the 38.8 per cent reduction in dividends and income tax equivalents, the income primarily due to the decreases in the electricity network sector driven by Energy Queensland's new regulation determinations from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2025.

How are we going to pay back this debt? There is no substantial infrastructure funding in the budget. The total royalty revenue is expected to fall a further 45.2 per cent in the next 12 months after a fall of 13.2 per cent in the 2019-20 year, and we have over 67 per cent of this state currently in drought. The tourism and hospitality industry has a long way back from locking out the rest of Australia and the traditional Victorians and New South Welshmen who come to Queensland in the winter to get away from the cold. That covers most of our traditional economic earners—resources, agriculture and tourism. The budget is a nothing budget. It offers no way out of the deep black hole that Labor has dug for Queensland over the past five years, 10 months and two days.