



Speech By  
**Sandy Bolton**


**MEMBER FOR NOOSA**

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Record of Proceedings, 3 December 2020

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

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 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (12.10 am): Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to respond to the 2020-21 appropriation bills. Firstly, I would like to commend the government on the efforts this past year. In a global pandemic and emergency, that Queensland has become an even more desired destination to relocate to by people and businesses from other states is testimony to how the health and economic aspects of COVID-19 have been managed—and we are experiencing that in Noosa right now.

Yes, along the way as MPs we have had grievances on behalf of our communities which emanated from several factors and which I submitted as part of the inquiry into the government's handling of COVID-19. In my speech to the COVID-19 bill this week—again I was unable to deliver it due to the time allocations process that needs reviewing—I noted that the greatest certainty we now need is how outbreaks will be managed into the future without the need to close borders.

As stated by the Treasurer, this budget has no surprises and continues on from the unite and recover strategy and COVID-19 Fiscal and Economic Review delivered in September this year. The focus on Queensland made and job creation through shovel-ready projects across the state remains prominent, and understandably so. Even though within my own community we may not have been as prepared as we could have been with these 'shovel-readies', to see a focus on Queensland attempting to become self-reliant, and greater so, is of benefit to all. I note the contribution by the member for Traeger about what our communities ask for in social infrastructure versus the less popular projects that deliver legacy benefits and how conflicting this can be.

Increased or new funding in a number of arenas important to my electorate includes wellness professionals in our schools, palliative care and suicide prevention initiatives—and I will be seeking our share. Extra firefighters and police, given the ongoing management of COVID-19, are essential. I also trust within funding allocations that the capabilities of drones will quickly be introduced to assist our frontliners in their endeavours, as well as further funding for firefighting innovations that proudly call Noosa home.

Even though our own TAFE was closed seven years ago and is resuming in an expressions of interest process now that the caretaker period is over, the free courses and apprenticeships now available for people up to 25 years of age will be welcomed by many. I thank the department for committing resources to assist our Noosa Education and Training Alliance in efforts to develop an education hub, as this is vital for our community and future. I just trust that it does not take as long to get this established as how long the decommissioned TAFE has sat there.

For our businesses it is positive to see that government will now have a 25 per cent target in procurement from our small to medium businesses, embedding non-price related considerations of social and environmental outcomes. We need the 'support and buy local' campaign to be more than

just a slogan. These commitments will assist, as will the continuation and extension of grants, including the extremely popular and oversubscribed small business adaption grant, retention of other initiatives such as payroll tax refunds and payment waivers which have all been invaluable to many Noosa businesses during this time. If we could, as requested of the Small Business Commissioner, create a level playing field for our producers battling against cheaper overseas imports, it would be a game changer. We need to support our own.

For Noosa, there definitely were no surprises, as the majority of commitments in this budget had already been announced, including the funding for stage 1 of Beckmans Road, replacement of Six Mile Bridge No. 7 and Noosa Parade—which were all greatly appreciated. Stages 2 and 3 of the Beckmans upgrade were not expected to be in the mix given the slow progress of designs. However, I trust that TMR and Noosa council will escalate efforts to have those ready for the next budget in June—unbelievably only seven months away.

Additionally, other projects in our 'list' including upgrades to sports facilities and the Regen Hub have a way to go before funding consideration, though the smaller projects should have designs and costings ready for grants in the first part of 2021. We look forward to the release of the clinical master plan and that its findings are actioned to address our medical needs including expansion of our emergency department at the Noosa Hospital.

One urgent priority, as stressed at a meeting with the Minister for Transport last week, is to ensure that whatever funding is needed be available to address the devastating impact to our hinterland communities from the inappropriate and dangerous volume of heavy haulage on a route assessed as deficient and inherently unsuitable a decade ago. This is traumatising our residents, businesses and infrastructure. With designs and costings not expected until the new year, and alternative options that need to be investigated and the advice from Noosa council's barrister due, I cannot believe that, with the resources available including legislation and laws developed to protect our people and communities, this is happening. It is totally unacceptable and must be resolved urgently, without blame as to whose fault it is or any excuses.

Grants and funding have delivered much to our community organisations, businesses and council through the COVID-19 Works for Queensland. This gives the ability to grow, service and maintain our community facilities as well as provide jobs. I seek again, as every year, that Noosa be permanently included in this program as it is vital for an electorate heavily impacted by underemployment and other socio-economic issues shared by neighbouring electorates that are eligible.

Volunteer organisations remain the most undervalued in our communities, and those that provide lifesaving and enhancing services—and need to sausage sizzle their way to do so—need greater considerations. Yes, grants are given and appreciated with reviews undertaken to find a fairer funding model. However, in these efforts there are concerns from volunteers surrounding proposed structural changes, and these should be consulted on extensively with them.

There are some components missing in this budget that are essential as part of our recovery. I have made no secret of the historical crisis faced in Noosa, and now the broader Sunshine Coast, of the lack of affordable housing and emergency accommodation. The budget includes \$88.1 million for social housing in the greater Sunshine Coast region, and I trust that this includes community housing in my electorate for our workers. This is vital for our key industries that are heavily casualised and unable to source staff due to a lack of affordable rentals. In comparable countries, 20 per cent of housing is classified as community, with Australia hosting only some five per cent. The provision of social housing is not only a job creator but also has a positive flow-on effect to the ramifications of housing and financial duress including substance abuse, domestic violence, mental and physical health. All levels of government must work together on this. As I have said before, there can be no more excuses on this.

Our environment is an asset that continues to be underfunded. A key component of our economy is the attraction of our natural spaces. Locations such as Noosa, with unlimited numbers of visitors to our national parks and recreation areas, with limited funds to adequately manage, see their economic viability under threat.

Financial management must incorporate asset management, and when it is not maintained it becomes a liability. Overall, as stated at the beginning, this budget has no surprises. Yes, concerns have been raised, including with regard to the level of our debt. There have been reassurances from several indicators—we have retained our Standard & Poor's rating—that the interest from Queensland's investments will cover the interest associated with this debt.

Debate in this chamber is understandably confusing to Queenslanders—and I am getting many questions on Facebook about this—as to the \$4 billion versus \$28 billion debt. A clear statement from the Treasurer on this is needed to clear up any confusion.

Regardless of who is in government, those in opposition will give examples of missing out, where funds have been cut or targets not met, including myself. I think of this and examples in my own community over the years where projects have been taken off QTRIP or our TAFE closed, with these funds obviously then being utilised elsewhere—in other electorates maybe? Is it the case that we exist in an economy of longstanding where we rob Peter to pay Paul as a norm? If we are, how do we finally move beyond this? A simple place to start is with our processes. We can all give hundreds of examples where the simplest of endeavours gets lost in elongated and costly inaction. Let's move to efficiency in how we operate and innovate, not procrastinate.

Nobody ever said this part of our journey through the COVID recovery was going to be easy and would not incur some heavy costs. To take us from the 'survive and strive' mode we have endured since the beginning of the year to our 'thrive' destination we must do whatever it takes with foresight and projects with legacy benefits for our next generations. With the next budget literally only half a year away, my community will be focused on getting our projects to a shovel-ready stage so they can be considered in the 2021-22 budget. Where needed, I will continue to personally fund the emergency accommodation we lack, provide transport to hospital appointments which are absent for our frail, and provide grassroots clarity around what our communities face and what they seek.

To say that this has been an extenuating year, leading to an extremely difficult budget and estimates process, is an understatement. Before I close, it is relevant to note that to scrutinise the service delivery statements and compile questions for some seven committees covering multiple departments does not give the crossbench members or the opposition adequate time to do our job thoroughly, which is to scrutinise, question and hold the government to account. Again I ask that the components of the standing and sessional orders that contribute to these shortfalls be reviewed in the new year.

Our appreciation goes to all who have worked extensively to deliver this budget, as well scrutinised, including ministers and departments. May 2021 bring a much easier year on multiple fronts for all Queenslanders.