



Speech By  
**Stephen Andrew**


**MEMBER FOR MIRANI**

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

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 **Mr ANDREW** (Mirani—PHON) (1.37 am): I rise to speak on the appropriation bill 2020. I apologise in advance if I am not as spectacular as the member for Nicklin was in his speech. I am very proud to serve the Mirani electorate and I intend to work as hard as I can during my second term to make sure that the people of Mirani are given every chance possible to achieve a better quality of life, with better education and job opportunities, affordable housing and improved health services.

On their behalf, I therefore welcome this year's budget. This government has finally delivered a budget that recognises that Queensland does not stop at the borders of the south-east region. The Mirani electorate has been given a vital \$272.9 million in budget allocations for a whole range of infrastructure and services that have been badly needed for some time now.

I was particularly pleased to see the green light that has been given for the new two-lane highway connecting the Mackay Ring Road to the Peak Downs Highway and to finally see the long-awaited Walkerston bypass move ahead. Unfortunately, there is nothing for the Sarina Surf Life Saving Club or \$500,000 for the Marian tuckshop that was promised during the election. The \$250,000 that was promised for Ridglands State School did not materialise either.

Some schools got a welcome funding boost with money allocated for a new performing arts and sports hall at Sarina State High School and the Bouldercombe playground shade project. I was disappointed that some of the projects we asked for such as two new high schools—one in Ooralea in the north of my electorate and one in Gracemere in the south of my electorate—to accommodate the growing populations in their respective areas were not addressed.

Unfortunately, a much needed ambulance station to service our growing population in Marian was not in this budget. I know that there was land allocated for that. I am not sure whether the state still owns that. I will be looking into that. We demonstrated that delayed response times to Marian are leaving many in that community vulnerable. I will continue to make representations, petition and lobby around those issues. Basically, I will do whatever I can to ensure that those other projects and programs in the region are not forgotten in the next funding round.

The budget papers make for a pretty sobering read. According to the Treasurer, there has been a \$3.5 billion hit to the state's coffers, with GST receipts, tax and royalties all down along with lower coal and oil prices. The promised \$234 million surplus predicted for this financial year has turned into an \$8.63 billion deficit. Government borrowings will now be a \$130 billion debt burden on the state by 2023, with annual deficits for the next four years at least. All this is at a time of plummeting state revenues and rock bottom levels of confidence in the business and wider community. That is a pretty grim outlook by anyone's measure.

The Treasurer presented the government's economic strategy of piling on the debt burden as the only fiscally responsible strategy to rescue the economy. His argument was based on two highly optimistic assumptions. The first is that the path to recovery has already started and the second is that Queensland's fundamental economic indicators were all in healthy shape going into COVID. Neither is correct.

Before COVID we had an ageing population and an economy riddled with pre-existing structural problems. Last year Queensland had the highest rate of business foreclosures, a massively inflated property bubble and the lowest level of business confidence in the country—a country with the highest level of household debt-to-income ratio of any nation on the planet. COVID was just the final tipping point and we will not know the true cost of that until all the government stimulus and support programs end around March next year.

I was very concerned to see in the budget that the majority of the government's loan borrowings are being spent on day-to-day operations. That is, simply paying the bills and keeping the lights on. That is a very bad sign. It means we are no longer borrowing for growth and we are borrowing to survive. It also means that the debt we are carrying is not just unsustainable, but probably almost unpayable at this point.

There were also a lot of crucial details missing in the budget papers and the Treasurer's speech. For example, how many businesses and farms have been forced to close down this year? How many Queenslanders are currently deferring their loan repayments? Most of all, why does this government insist on continuing to invest billions building massive state-of-the-art sports and entertainment stadiums, indeed duplicating stadiums in both Rockhampton and Mackay, when we cannot afford it?

While some may be needed, many were not. A lot of the people and communities of those areas would have preferred to use such massive amounts of expenditure on upgrades and improvements to their badly degraded road infrastructure and poorly resourced services, including their schools, hospitals, emergency and rural frontline stations and precincts, sporting fields and community halls. Why are hundreds of Queensland's regional sporting clubs and associations left to struggle with old, run-down and dilapidated facilities while people are forced to watch huge multimillion dollar stadiums go up in places where the population would be hard pressed to fill the massive seating capacity at the best of times? Why does the government not consult with local people and communities before awarding insane amounts of money for the hugely expensive white elephant projects they did not ask for and programs they did not even need?

In 2012 the government promised and funded a plan for a major upgrade of Brewers Park in Sarina to be completed by 2022. Let me be clear: Sarina is not a suburb of Mackay. Eight years later and nothing has been done. It is heartbreaking to see all the kids who play their weekly fixtures on the fields at Brewers Park forced to wade through pools of water because the drainage cannot cope and it constantly floods. I have spoken to some of the young kids and they told me that they have to go behind the toilets or behind trees to urinate because the toilet blocks do not work. That is disgusting and shameful considering we have two stadiums in Mackay, 400 metres apart. We are spending \$24 million on one and the other is hardly ever used and yet Brewers Park goes unnoticed. This was a funded plan. There needs to be much more follow-through by the state government with the councils to make sure that the moneys they award to regions for specific projects are spent on those projects and in a timely manner.

The federal Treasury is also forecasting that 86,000 people will migrate from other states to Queensland over the next four years. Where are the impact assessments for this huge influx of people into our already overcrowded towns and cities? What will that do to our jobs and housing market and all our hospitals and schools and the justice system that are already struggling to cope with the massive population boom Queensland has gone through in the last few years?

Another concern is that the government still seems intent on wasting hundreds of millions on risky venture capital type investment on emerging industries like advanced manufacturing, high-tech weaponry, untried biotech and gene based innovation as well as overpriced and unreliable government IT software management systems. That is without even mentioning the heavily funded and oversubsidised renewables projects and support programs or the many thousands of other very dicey and usually loss-making green projects the government seems wedded to.

Whatever you think of green project spending, I can tell members one thing for sure. Not one of them is capable of creating more than a handful of highly specialised jobs. What we should be doing is dropping water and electricity prices and letting the economic stimulus that results from that go through our towns. People manufacturing and people who own businesses will be able to use more and produce

more. It is jobs—real, permanent, rewarding and long-term jobs—that the people of Queensland are crying out for right now. Not sometime in the future, when we have all been transitioned and re-skilled but right now, today.

Where is the investment in the real economy? We need to play to our strengths and put the money where it will do the most good. I could not find anywhere in the budget where funds were to be spent on fostering and developing the real productive sectors of our economy. It is like no-one in government has the first clue about business or even just plain common sense. I thought COVID might have woken us all up.

What we needed in this budget was targeted injections of funding and support for small business, mining and agriculture—all areas that have a tried and true record of creating wealth and jobs for Queenslanders. They are the backbone of this state. Rolling back vegetation management and reef regulations would give our economy a boost right here and right now. Let us do it. Common sense will cost nothing but it will increase production for our state. What about the Bligh Labor government's coal plan 2030, implemented in November 2010? Why did we not revisit it and put it back into play? That was one of Labor's ideas. We could have moved forward. What Queensland got was another budget that ignored core priorities and saw additional borrowings piled onto an already mountainous debt burden and zero moves to end government waste, red tape and bureaucracy.