




Speech By
Amy MacMahon

MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE

Record of Proceedings, 18 June 2021

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

 **Dr MacMAHON** (South Brisbane—Grn) (5.13 pm): I start by offering my condolences to the family and friends of Duncan Pegg. Duncan and I shared this chamber for only a short time but we attended many community events together over the years. I saw how much Duncan loved his community and how much they loved him.

I rise in response to the 2021-22 Queensland budget, a document that says absolutely everything about this government's priorities. This budget was an opportunity for the government to think big and show courage and bold vision to drive Queensland's economic recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, but that is not what we have. Instead, we have a budget that thinks small. It lumps everyday Queenslanders with cuts instead of making big banks, property developers and mining corporations pay their fair share to provide the essential services that Queenslanders need. Along with my Greens colleague, the member for Maiwar, I wrote to the Treasurer ahead of the budget urging him to prioritise investing in jobs, housing, schools, health and critical infrastructure. We could do all of that by making the big end of town pay its fair share.

The revenue measures that we took to the election are common sense: a bank levy of 0.05 per cent on the five biggest banks operating in Queensland; a developer tax on land value gains from up zoning applying to developers who are redeveloping the land; lifting the cap on infrastructure charges so that local councils can charge developers according to the cost of delivering infrastructure; and, of course, ending the freeze on mining royalties and increasing them to ensure that mining corporations pay their fair share. The resources sector has been receiving red-carpet treatment for years now. The mining royalties freeze that my predecessor enacted in 2019 is still in play, while mining billionaires pocket billions of dollars that should be going to everyday Queenslanders. During 2020, when the rest of the state was in lockdown in the name of public health, the resources sector was designated as an essential industry and work continued unabated. The sector is not doing it tough. It exported \$45 billion worth of exports over the past year. Projections for coal exports are down but only to about 2015 levels and there is no excuse for not raising royalties.

The government will say it has to cut services or borrow more money rather than holding the big end of town to account and ending the free ride for their big corporate mates. And the result? This week we saw some of the most disgraceful and misleading claims from the Treasurer that we have seen in a long time in Queensland.

On Tuesday we were thrilled to hear the government announce more funding for social housing. That is something that we and the sector have been pushing for for years. In the midst of a housing crisis, with 47,000 people waiting for social housing, a third of Queensland renters in housing stress and a rising number of people in insecure housing or sleeping rough, that looked like a welcome announcement. However, a closer examination of the budget revealed a different story.

Capital expenditure for social housing by the department of housing has been cut by \$20 million from last year. The \$1 billion Housing Investment Fund is also a farce. Of that \$1 billion, Queenslanders will see only \$160 million, which supposedly will build 3,600 homes over the forward years, but only if the private sector gets enough incentives or enough handouts to make it happen. In the end super funds and private companies will be walking away with profits off the backs of some of the most vulnerable Queenslanders. We know what works: good quality public housing delivered by the government. Profit driven development of social housing will end up delivering shoddy homes and hand profits to corporations.

The story of the government misleading Queenslanders on public housing investment may not be new, but the proof will be in the pudding. With the housing crisis getting worse by the week, the test of the government's investment will be how many people are still facing homelessness when we head to the next election.

Every week my office staff help folks in housing stress. On the night of the budget we helped someone find crisis accommodation when he had nowhere else to go. Last month we negotiated to ensure a mother would not be evicted into homelessness. When we support someone who has been on the social housing waiting list for too long, someone who has nowhere to sleep at night or someone who is at the complete whim of their landlord about whether their home will remain their home, Queensland's housing crisis is not just a tagline or a political tool; it is a personal reality and we will keep fighting for those people.

I will keep fighting for the renters of Queensland who are struggling with an unjust system that is massively stacked in favour of wealthy investors and the real estate industry. Tenants Queensland has said that the budget does very little to support the 1.8 million Queenslanders who rent their homes. The 1.8 million Queenslanders who rent deserve security with rent caps, an end to rent bidding and a genuine end to no-grounds evictions. For two years in a row the government has capitulated to the real estate lobby rather than Queenslanders and then it wonders why it is losing progressive seats to the Greens.

This past year shows how vital our health system is. Can you imagine how it would look if mining corporations paid their fair share? If we raised revenue from the big end of town, we could create 21,000 more hospital beds, 1,000 more ICU beds and raise Queensland to world-best standard. We could employ at least 6,500 genuinely new nurses and 3,000 more doctors, expanding much needed emergency department capacity and improve nurse- and doctor-to-patient ratios. We could build hundreds of public health clinics with free publicly funded paid GPs and specialists to take the pressure off our hospital system.

The budget includes \$40.3 million for new hospital parking facilities, but no steps to ease the burden on Queenslanders with free hospital parking. Instead, the \$1 billion savings dividend remains in place, forcing frontline staff to do more with less. The budget papers themselves tell a story of outpatient and emergency waiting times. Only 65 per cent of specialist outpatient waits are within clinically recommended times. Only 70 per cent of emergency patients were transferred off the stretcher within 30 minutes.

The COVID-19 crisis was the biggest disruption to our health system and our economy in modern times. To power our recovery takes enormous investment in jobs and services. By increasing the number of frontline health workers, we can ensure our health system is resourced to do its job, while ensuring our job market and economy continue to recover.

I also note with sadness the closure of three regional Marie Stopes clinics this week, leaving just five abortion clinics remaining in all of Queensland. Despite finally decriminalising abortion in 2018, geography and finance remain barriers for many Queenslanders wishing to access reproductive health services.

Before I was elected, Labor continually told the progressive voters in my electorate that the Greens should not be running against a government that had delivered abortion law reform. But what is the point of making abortion legal if people in regional and rural areas have nowhere to access the services or cannot afford it? This budget saw no new money for abortion services and support. To truly deliver on abortion law reform, the government needs to imbed essential reproductive health care in hospitals and health services and ensure genuinely accessible and free termination services in Queensland.

Like universal public health, fully funded state schools are not out of reach either. Queensland has some of the most underfunded state schools in the country, and parents, teachers and children pay the cost. Over the past 10 years, state funding per public school student decreased by \$128, while

funding for private and Catholic schools has increased by \$220 and \$246 per student respectively. In Queensland, we have no plan to reach 100 per cent schooling resources standard funding. We are at just 69 per cent of the 80 per cent we are meant to be putting into our state schools.

In a wealthy state like Queensland, there is no reason why our state schools should go underfunded. Brisbane State High School, my alma mater in South Brisbane, one of the biggest high schools in the country, is ironically one of the most underfunded. While infrastructure funding for Brisbane South State Secondary College, Buranda State School, West End State School and Dutton Park State School are all exceptionally welcomed, this does nothing to help parents with the everyday cost of schools. We can fully fund our public education system and bring the government's share of needs based schooling resources standard funding to 80 per cent by investing an extra \$1.5 billion a year, a fraction of what we could raise each year by raising coal, LNG and mineral royalties.

People with disabilities continue to face barriers in nearly all aspects of public life and should not have to fight for dignity. After a powerful campaign from disability organisations, the government committed to ongoing funding for advocacy services that I am pleased to see reflected in the budget. I am pleased to see \$7.3 million to support people who are ineligible for the NDIS, and I will be seeking details on where this money is going and who will be eligible.

I would like to note my dismay that Narbethong State Special School has not received any funding in this budget. Narbethong provides specialist teaching for students with vision impairment. They cater to a cohort of 50 students and 80 preschool aged students who have vision impairment and other disabilities. Many of these students have very high needs. The staff are exceptionally talented with their teaching model that is world renowned, but the school buildings were built in the 1960s and they are no longer fit to deliver for the safety and dignity of those students. This budget has allocated no extra funding for this school and, in a wealthy state like Queensland, there is no excuse for this. I will continue to push for Narbethong to get the funding that they deserve.

I also note East Brisbane State School will potentially be severely impacted by the redevelopment of the Gabba Stadium for the Olympics vanity project. I am disappointed that this school, students, families and the community have also been overlooked.

So, too, have other parts of my electorate. I wrote to the Treasurer ahead of the budget advocating for jobs, housing, schools and infrastructure to get the priority they deserve. For a start, we want to see funding for the Kangaroo Point River Walk expanded to meet its true cost. Given Brisbane City Council has failed to contribute funds, we want to see the state kick in more than the \$22.5 million it has committed, which is only a third of what this project would need.

Further, we want to see an investment in active public transport which sees the 192 bus service expanded and CityGliders introduced east-west and north-south. These routes would fill some of the biggest gaps in the inner Brisbane transport network and would connect thousands of Kangaroo Point residents with the new Cross River Rail station at the Gabba. To keep ensuring our cycling infrastructure is safe, we want to see specific funding for protected bike lanes along Vulture Street.

I also want to give credit to the work of a few organisations in my electorate that have not received extra funding but will continue to work tirelessly. The Mater Refugee Complex Care Clinic, an integrated refugee health service, provides vital care for people from refugee backgrounds, with a particular focus on those who cannot access Medicare.

Eating Disorders Queensland offers treatment for people living with and recovering from eating disorders, their carers and loved ones. Of the \$27 million allocated by the federal government for the treatment of eating disorders, some of which will be distributed by the states, I call on the state government to ensure that Eating Disorders Queensland gets an opportunity to administer funding via their programs. I will also keep advocating for increased funding for community centres like West End Community House and organisations like Community Friends that provide food relief for folks right across Brisbane.

Why should Queenslanders be waiting for essential health care when there has been a royalty freeze for the mining sector? Why should our schools be underfunded and our housing waitlist blow out when our government refuses to raise revenue from the big end of town? The options for increasing the state's revenue are all there and they are no secret. Levies on developers and big banks, as well as options for more effective mining royalties, have all been well tested in the marketplace of ideas. The case is there and the numbers are clear. I cannot stay silent while the government trumpets its progressive credentials and so many Queenslanders go unrepresented. This budget allows the big end of town to continue its free ride, and it is everyday Queenslanders who are left behind.