




Speech By
Ann Leahy

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (12.44 pm): It is my pleasure to rise and speak on the address-in-reply debate. Firstly, I pass onto His Excellency the Governor Paul de Jersey my best wishes on behalf of the parliament and my disappointment with the time it has taken for the parliament to work their way through this address-in-reply. Further, I look forward to His Excellency's continued visits to my electorate, especially those communities such as Hungerford who received their first ever visit from a Queensland governor. I wish to thank the voters of the Warrego electorate for putting their faith in me to represent their interests and goals for the forthcoming four-year term. I also wish to thank the hundreds of volunteers and supporters who helped out on pre polls at the election and on the election day across my electorate. It is a logistical exercise in an electorate larger than Victoria.

I would also like to thank my electorate office staff: Gerardine, who mans the second office in Dalby on her own; Shannon, who stepped into the role bravely during the election; and Paige, who whilst pregnant dealt with many election and constituent inquiries. We all wish Paige the very best for the birth of her second child in March.

As I stood in this House two terms ago to make my maiden speech, I did so as the first woman elected to the state seat of Warrego since Federation. With the support of my constituents, I stand here today making history as the first woman ever elected for three consecutive terms since Federation as the member for Warrego. I wish to thank Deb Frecklington and Tim Mander—and particularly their families for what they have done to support Tim and Deb—for the service that Tim and Deb have given their respective leadership roles in the last parliament and the work they have done for Queenslanders across this state. I also extend my congratulations to David Crisafulli and David Janetzki on their election to the position of Leader of the Opposition and Deputy Leader of the Opposition. I admire them both for taking on these leadership roles. I look forward to working with them and holding the Labor government to account.

It is a privilege to serve as a shadow minister in the LNP shadow cabinet. It is an honour again to work with Queensland local governments in an expanded role as the shadow minister for local government, disaster recovery and volunteers. I have developed many relationships and good friends with mayors and councillors and their staff in the local government sector across the state, regardless of what their politics might be. I look forward to continuing these relationships and working with the newly elected mayors and councillors who have taken up their first term after the 2020 local government elections.

I take the appointment as the shadow minister for disaster recovery very personally due to the 2010 and 2012 Roma floods. Natural disasters and Queensland seem to go hand in hand. Queenslanders certainly receive probably a little bit more than their fair share. There are always ways to minimise the impacts of these disasters and make lives safer for Queenslanders. There needs to be a strong focus on disaster prevention to minimise the impacts that Queenslanders so often feel. For too long, communities have experienced the high cost of insurance—and I know about that personally after floods—and mitigation and prevention is one way to help drive down those insurance costs for mums and dads, especially those who are paying disproportionate costs in North Queensland, that is if they

can get insurance at all. Prevention has a much lower cost financially and on human capital than recovery. I note there are predictions of a strong cyclone season in Queensland—so far, so good. However, I always remind people that the devastating Charleville flood was in April 1990. I hope many parts of Queensland receive drought-breaking rains for the areas that have so far missed out but I hope the damage is minimal.

I will now turn to some issues across my electorate. I wish to draw the attention of the House to some of the problems that occurred at the state election in October in the electorate of Warrego. The polling booths of Mungindi and Dirranbandi were closed at short notice just before election day, despite being advertised polling booths. There is no public transport to the next closest available polling booth at Thallon and the travel time is about half an hour or 45 minutes.

It was disappointing that the only place to find this information about these closed booths was buried in a press release on the Electoral Commission's website. That is not very helpful to communities and to people who want to vote, especially when they do not have a local newspaper. Further, in the Warrego electorate there were more postal ballots rejected by the Electoral Commission for not being sealed, signed or witnessed than there were informal ballots. Across Queensland there were some 57,000 postal ballots that were rejected.

What disappoints most is that these rejected postal ballots are not reported in the same manner as informal ballots. Without reporting a rejected ballot, the electoral voting system is lacking transparency and transparency brings about public confidence in the electoral system. Those 57,000 Queenslanders would have thought they were providing a valid postal vote only to now find that it has been rejected. Without public reporting of these rejected ballots, there is no way to benchmark if this number is increasing or decreasing.

COVID has placed a strong focus on cleaning and sanitisation, and I think that is a good thing. Particularly in public buildings and in the community this is welcomed. I am, however, disappointed that this Labor government talks about a world-class health system and then fails to support regional hospitals to meet the expectations of general cleanliness. I received this email from a mum with a sick child who visited the COVID isolation room in the Dalby Hospital on Monday this week during the latest heatwave when it was 37 degrees. Her email said—

My son and I had to be in yesterday afternoon 22nd February 2021.

Bed wasn't made mouse droppings were on it.

Bed wasn't working couldn't get the side down it was stuck up. Bed had rusted.

Dead bugs grasshoppers dirty cotton buds on the floors.

Air con not working.

Table all bent up and broken.

Sticky stuff all over the walls.

Light doesn't even work and what looks like a water leak.

3 different people were notified, 2 nurses and the doctor.

The nurses shrugged it off and the doctor told me it would be cleaned after I left.

There was no circulation and the room felt like an oven, I had to open the back door just for a bit of breeze, then we ended up covered in flies. Waited for an hour before my son was given pain relief or a cold cloth.

This is a busy regional hospital. The doctors, nurses and staff want to deliver a world-class hospital system. However, to do so, they need to be better supported by the Palaszczuk Labor government, especially at the Dalby Hospital. It is another example where this Labor government say one thing then do nothing to support the regional hospital staff and patients. It is just not good enough.

Another matter that is causing concern across my electorate is that of the drought. The drought is not over in many parts. It may have been overtaken by other issues. However, many landholders and communities have only just received some relief rains. I note that there are numerous photos on social media which actually show that there are significant issues and also green droughts across the electorate. There are some good patches where there have been some isolated rainfalls and there are some still in dire straits. It is hard to explain that green drought, and I know that people at Quilpie had difficulty trying to explain it to the Prime Minister. It is where enough rain falls to grow some grass and it looks green, but there is not enough to refill the dams and run the creeks. Those people will be short of water going into this winter.

That also brings me to the issue of drought declarations that rely on advice from local drought committees. These local drought committees provide advice to the state government about whether an area or a local government should be removed from the drought declared list—and pretty much all of my electorate is on that drought declared list. They will consider these declarations on an annual basis,

usually in April. What is very concerning for producers, particularly those who have missed out or are in a patchy area where rain has fallen in some parts but not others, is that once the current drought declaration is revoked, the fodder and water freight subsidies will cease on the revocation of the current drought declarations.

The Queensland government clearly said in their response to the drought program review, which they initiated, that they supported the recommendation to remove these subsidies. I say to all producers: if you have not got your applications in for DRAS assistance it would be highly advisable to do so before these subsidies cease. I say to producers in the drought declared areas of my electorate and across the rest of the state: apply for these drought subsidies while you can because after the annual review in April these subsidies could well and truly be gone.

I was pleased that the Palaszczuk Labor government finally found a road west of the Great Dividing Range in their election campaign. They called it the 'inland Bruce'. One thing for sure is that it is certainly well inland of the Bruce Highway—about 600 kilometres. I will be keeping a watching brief on this Labor government commitment given there was no 80 per cent funding commitment from the Commonwealth for Labor's second Bruce. The state Labor government funding is mostly in the forward estimates beyond 2023-24. I am not holding my breath for a passing lane in the short term or any upgrades in the near future. However, if the state are serious about upgrading this road, they could reinstate the 110-kilometre-per-hour zone from Surat to St George which they removed. This road is now wider and safer than when the speed limit was 110 kilometres per hour and it makes sense to reinstate this speed zone for cars.

I will continue to remind the Palaszczuk Labor government of the other roads in the electorate that are in need of safety upgrades and repairs, and there are plenty of them. The single-lane bitumen roads are getting narrower and narrower every day under this Labor government. The bike tracks in some of the electorates in Brisbane are probably wider than some of these single-lane bitumen roads that B-doubles drive over in my electorate. The Roma Condamine Road is one such road where B-doubles filled with grain travel one way to feedlots while B-doubles of cattle travel in the opposite direction. I guarantee—I drove it the other day—that that single-lane bitumen road is not as wide as some of the bike tracks in Brisbane. Many of these roads have school bus runs like the Meandarra Talwood Road and the Jackson Wandoan Road. I will continue to advocate at every opportunity for the need to increase the maintenance of these roads with priority given to the sections where these school bus routes operate.

Whilst mentioning the Jackson Wandoan Road, there is \$250,000 to be spent on planning for the intersection with the Warrego Highway. I have to say that that is needed sooner rather than later because I really do not want to see that intersection become a black spot. Up to 30 June 2020 the Labor government has spent \$9,000 on two white survey pegs. They must be the most expensive survey pegs ever owned by a government. An amount of \$250,000 for intersection planning does seem to be a bit excessive. We are yet to hear if this will result in a much needed slip lane turning north on the Jackson Wandoan Road.

When it comes to the intersection of local roads and the Landsborough Highway at Augathella, the Augathella Progress Association and I will continue to fight for safety upgrades. My parliamentary colleague and I have actually been out there and stood there. If that intersection were in Brisbane, it would have been upgraded by now. It is incredibly dangerous. I am pleased that the Murweh Shire Council are strong in their support for this safety upgrade. I will do everything I can to assist the council and the community to increase the safety at this intersection on the Landsborough Highway.

Mr Krause: It is dangerous.

Ms LEAHY: It is dangerous; I take that interjection. There are many other roads like the Warry Gate Road, the Bollon to St George road to name a few that need sealing and maintenance.

I am pleased we are now seeing an increase in residential property sales in my electorate. Around Tara I am advised that 50 properties have been sold during 2020 and new people are moving to the district. The local agent advised that she has not seen this number of sales for a long time. Despite 2020 being a difficult year, finally the Tara district is reaping some benefits.

The local *South West* reports that a local agent in Roma sold 21 properties in the month of December 2020. In fact, she said that only 21 were sold for the whole of 2019. The agents are saying that the break in the season, the high cattle prices and the bargain basement interest rates have been assisting a strong property market across the rural industry, and that is a very positive thing for my electorate. Many of the residential sales are locals returning. We are also getting some long-term gas workers and contractors with the gas industry settling and buying homes. It has been a long fight to actually get those people and the contractors in that industry to not just buy local but to live locally as well. We are starting to see some of the changes and the things that we put in place with closing down camps actually starting to bring benefits to communities.

This, however, does cause some difficulty in the availability of rental properties in communities like St George, Roma and Dalby. The rental market is tight and that makes it difficult for local businesses that have jobs and wish to encourage people to move to these communities for these jobs. Across the communities of the south-west we have jobs. We have professional positions and blue-collar jobs. I popped the Roma postcode into Seek and it came up with 159 positions. It was a similar story for St George, 115 jobs; and Dalby, 239 jobs. We have plenty of work across the south-west. We need more people to come and fill these jobs. Sometimes there are no applicants for professional positions. It makes it very difficult for childcare providers to actually provide child care when they do not get applicants for positions that they advertise. Many of these positions are full-time permanent with good salaries, and the communities have a very high livability for young professionals and young families across these regional communities.

In Roma, St George and Dirranbandi, communities are all establishing country university centres. These country universities offer a campus life environment for students studying by distance: space, computers, videoconferencing facilities and a tutor to assist with general academic skills. They are a great boost to these—

Debate, on motion of Ms Leahy, adjourned.



Ms LEAHY (Warrego—LNP) (3.04 pm), continuing: In summary, the constituents of Warrego are disappointed by the manner in which the October 2020 state election was conducted, especially with the closure of polling booths with short notice and rejected postal ballots. Despite some rainstorms, the drought continues. However, should this Labor government revoke drought declarations in April, primary producers are fearful that they will lose valuable freight and fodder subsidies for good. I urge producers to apply now for their DRAS subsidies if they have not already done so.

The lack of horticulture workers is causing distress to fruit and veggie producers in my electorate. They will be reducing plantings simply because they do not have the staff to harvest the garlic, onions, broccoli and grapes. I am advised that the Commonwealth restarted the Pacific Labour Scheme and Seasonal Worker Program in August last year in anticipation of the looming harvest season. I am advised that Victoria remains the only jurisdiction yet to approve a quarantine plan for workers despite the chronic shortage of workers. I call on the state government to get busy on this quarantine plan because the producers in my electorate are desperate for these workers, as are other areas across the state.

We heard from the member for Burdekin about the need for workers in his area. We will see increased prices for food in our shops if we do not have those workers, because there simply will not be the produce coming through the system. I know that most of the grapes that you would have seen over the Christmas period actually came from the St George region. We had a huge job to get the Victorian workers for that company up over two closed borders so that we could meet those supply contracts for Woolworths, Coles and Aldi.

COVID has brought a focus on hygiene, and that is a good outcome. However, that does not seem to have extended to some of our hospitals—in particular, the Dalby Hospital. I call on the state Labor government to do more to support the hardworking doctors and nurses so that patients do not have to endure mouse droppings on beds and the lack of air conditioning in COVID isolation rooms.

The state Labor government need to do more to return birthing services to communities like Chinchilla. It is appalling that one of the birthing suites has been turned into an office. The mums and dads of Chinchilla want their birthing services returned. They do not want more offices. It is farcical. On the one hand, we hear the government saying they are going to return these birthing services. On the other hand, what we find at these hospitals is that offices are taking over the maternity suites. That is unacceptable.

When it comes to roads I will continue to fight for my electorate to receive its fair share. Roads are the lifeblood of our industries—agriculture; tourism, even though it has done it really tough during COVID; resources and manufacturing.

I am encouraged by the strong rural property sales across my electorate and the recent jump in residential sales. I think that shows a confidence in the economy across the electorate. We have some jobs. We desperately need people to move to my electorate because so many of these jobs are advertised and we do not get applicants. We have great communities to live in. There is a huge livability factor in these communities. People need to understand that they can get ahead when they come and live in those areas because often the cost of living is much lower.