




Speech By  
**Hon. Cameron Dick**

**MEMBER FOR WOODRIDGE**

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### **DEBT REDUCTION AND SAVINGS BILL**

 **Hon. CR DICK** (Woodridge—ALP) (Treasurer and Minister for Investment) (3.49 pm), in reply: I thank those members of the House who have provided their support for this important bill. This bill is designed to reduce the debt burden in Queensland and deliver savings. Simply put, this bill does what it says on the tin. The bill provides the mechanism for the Queensland Titles Registry to be contributed to the first Queensland Future Fund, the Debt Retirement Fund. The bill enables the new Titles Registry operator, owned by state entities, to deliver Titles Registry services by providing the transfer of functions, assets and employees from the Titles Registry to Registry Co. The bill also creates the authority for Registry Co to collect Titles Registry fees and, amongst other things, the right for the state to appoint an administrator in exceptional circumstances to ensure the proper performance of the Titles Registry functions delegated to the operator.

The bill also effects changes to the governance structure of the National Injury Insurance Agency Queensland by abolishing its board and transferring responsibility for its management to a chief executive officer, initially the Insurance Commissioner overseeing Queensland's compulsory third party insurance scheme. Bringing oversight of the two motor accident injury schemes together will save costs and deliver efficiencies.

The bill also restructures the governance of the government's productivity policies by repealing the Queensland Productivity Commission Act 2015. The bill abolishes the Queensland Productivity Commission and enables the integration of the commission's economic policy experts into the new Office of Productivity and Red Tape Reduction. This new office will support an additional focus on productivity and regulatory reform as part of the government's economic recovery policies. It will retain the in-depth and longer term focus of the Queensland Productivity Commission which will support the development of expert economic policy advice.

The bill also repeals the Building Queensland Act 2015 to abolish Building Queensland and integrate its functions, staff, assets and resources into the department administered by the Deputy Premier, the Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning. I would like to take the opportunity to thank Building Queensland's board, CEO and staff for their hard work and expert advice over the past five years.

The integration of Building Queensland staff into the Deputy Premier's department ensures that the expertise and capability demonstrated by the Building Queensland team will remain in the department, continuing the strong contribution to the state's infrastructure planning. The reformed approach aims to strike the balance between assisting agencies to deliver good quality proposals and enabling more strategic oversight of proposal development at a much earlier time. Taking a more active role in early planning, before proposals are locked in, will see the Deputy Premier's department assist agencies to develop stronger capital and strategic asset management plans to meet service delivery requirements. This coordinated approach will help deliver infrastructure that underpins economic growth, boosts social and environmental outcomes, supports jobs and will create long-term prosperity for Queenslanders.

The repeal of the Public Safety Business Agency Act is a demonstration of the Palaszczuk government's commitment to keeping Queenslanders safe. Our communities want and deserve the best frontline services possible. This government will support our frontline workers by ensuring that we have the best management practices possible so that they can get on with the job of protecting our communities. When addressing the Economics and Governance Committee, Queensland Police Service Deputy Commissioner Doug Smith stated that these changes will lead to the achievement of a more efficient governance structure as well as a better integration of staff within organisations.

The bill also provides that where a state law requires or authorises government agencies to publish information in print, this is now satisfied by publishing online. The practical effect is that government agencies must publish certain information online rather than in print. This is a modernisation, cost-saving and red-tape reduction measure.

The fee unit model will streamline the annual process of indexing regulatory fees and reduce administrative inefficiencies for agencies and the Office of the Queensland Parliamentary Counsel. Removing these administrative inefficiencies for both agencies and the Office of the Queensland Parliamentary Counsel will save money and realise substantial productivity gains across government, as staffing effort can be redirected to focus on service delivery and higher value priorities.

As I said in my opening remarks, Queensland's nation-leading health response to COVID-19 has delivered our nation-leading economic response. Our targeted economic recovery plan has meant Queensland's economy has bounced back faster than every other state. During debate some members opposite complained that the Economic Recovery Plan had disappeared. Rest assured, members of the LNP, it is alive and well and powering Queensland's recovery. I table it again for the benefit of all members of the House.

*Tabled paper:* Queensland Government Unite & Recover publication titled 'Queensland's Economic Recovery Plan' [728](#).

I remind LNP members once again, even though they deliberately choose wilful ignorance, that we have added more jobs since the pandemic started than any other state or territory. Our economic growth is twice as fast as the next fastest growing state and as a result our balance sheet is in a stronger position than many other states and territories.

I note that during the debate, the member for Mermaid Beach cited the impact of COVID-19 on the United Kingdom, which has endured the worst recession in 300 years. Tragically, the mismanagement of the pandemic by the Boris Johnson Tory government has seen as many as one in seven citizens infected with COVID-19 and 128,000 deaths. A non-existent health response has led to a catastrophic economic result.

During the debate we saw several two-bit wordsmiths try their hand at retitling the bill. The member for Mermaid Beach tried his hand with the 'avoid a ratings agency downgrade bill'. In his defence, this bill has been favourably looked upon by the ratings agencies, but more on that later. Then we had the member for Everton with the 'questionable savings bill'. For a savings bill that apparently raised so many questions, I was disappointed that the former shadow treasurer did not ask more during the debate. Of course, the member for Kawana took the cake with his incredibly elegant suggestion, the 'debt non-reduction and minimal savings bill'. What a poet! We have not seen a more creative mind at work since the bloke who came up with the playground classic, 'I know you are, you said you are, but what am I?'

Those opposite also drew attention to the time allocated to the bill. The LNP's wafer-thin contribution to the committee report complained of having insufficient time allocated to considering the bill. After whingeing and moaning incessantly every sitting week since the dawn of time that the LNP had insufficient time to debate bills, when given the opportunity to debate a significant and important bill during a full sitting week the LNP whinged and moaned incessantly that they had too much time to debate a bill! What a sickening but nonetheless typical double standard of the LNP.

Now that the government has given every member opposite a full week to debate debt reduction and savings, the LNP find themselves with too much time to deliver their alternative three word vision for the Queensland economy: cut, sack, sell. The LNP revert to the lazy old stereotype of 'better financial management'. The people of Queensland have left the LNP behind because they know that Labor's management of the COVID crisis was world class and that Labor are the better economic managers. In their first budget, the last LNP government not only managed to sack 14,000 Queenslanders, it also racked up a \$4.6 billion deficit and added \$7.5 billion to general government sector debt.

**Mr Bailey:** Quite an effort!

**Mr DICK:** I take the interjection from the minister. Quite an effort! We know the LNP is dismissive of so-called 'borrowing to keep the lights on', something I note that the Morrison LNP government is borrowing \$1.1 trillion to do, but the Queensland LNP managed the rare feat of borrowing to turn the

lights off! If you are going to rack up debt you should probably use it to support Queenslanders, LNP, not sack them. This goes to a broader point on debt that the LNP is dishonestly misrepresenting to the people of Queensland. Several times during the debate the LNP tried unsuccessfully to mount a case that \$4 billion in fact equals \$28 billion. Let me spell it out clearly for those opposite: as part of the economic recovery plan, the Palaszczuk Labor government followed the advice of the Reserve Bank governor and increased borrowings to support Queensland's economy.

I announced at the COVID-19 Fiscal and Economic Review that our government would borrow \$4 billion for additional economic recovery measures. The opposition now seeks to conflate that with \$28 billion in borrowings. That \$28 billion reflects \$4 billion for economic recovery measures; \$2 billion in deferred withdrawals from the defined benefit fund; \$1 billion in job support loans through QRIDA; movements in the capital position and in cash holdings by government-owned corporations; and \$19 billion in revisions to the operating position relative to the 2019-20 budget. The simple fiscal arithmetic, which the Morrison government is also exposed to, is that borrowings must rise to cover the gap between falling revenues and increasing expenditures induced by COVID.

Are there alternative approaches? During the debate, the LNP offered three familiar alternatives: cut, sack, and sell. These are the only three ways the LNP know how to reduce debt and produce savings, and it fuels the LNP's hatred for this bill, a bill that reduces debt without selling assets and that generates savings without resorting to savage cuts or sackings.

Turning to the substance of the arguments from those opposite, we have heard that the debt reduction is a smokescreen, the valuation of the Titles Registry is overblown and that the ratings agencies will not be convinced by the Queensland Future Fund. On debt reduction, members opposite dishonestly trundled out the mistruth that the LNP did not sell anything while holding what they thought was a smoking gun on government land transactions. Unfortunately, they had the smoking gun gripped by the barrel and turned on themselves because there is a long record of LNP land sales.

Writing in the *Australian Financial Review* in October 2014, Mark Ludlow and Matthew Cranston documented the \$10.7 billion worth of assets sold by the LNP since 2012, including the \$7.1 billion sale of Queensland Motorways. When Queensland Motorways was sold, the office of the LNP Treasurer, the member for Clayfield, endorsed the deal by saying 'investors clearly have confidence in the Queensland economy'. Sadly for the LNP, that confidence was not shared by the people of Queensland who saw the LNP's \$37 billion privatisation program looming and promptly wiped out the Newman and Nicholls government. As 'LNP' is an acronym that stands for 'Leaving Nothing Public', Queensland ports, electricity transmission networks and water pipes were all on the chopping block.

As everyone on this side of the House knows, given the chance the LNP will do it all over again, as LNP speaker after LNP speaker insisted when they suggested that the sensible debt reduction measures in this bill did not go far enough. Among others, the member for Mermaid Beach gave the game away when he said of the Titles Registry valuation—

... an asset only has a definitive determinable valuation when market forces can determine that valuation ... In other words, if you are not actually selling the Titles Registry, there is no chance of finding out the real market value ...

The LNP members, who were very keen to talk about government sector net worth at the last budget, now think that we cannot know the value of anything until we sell everything. This bill proves the opposite. The fact that the Queensland Titles Registry is valued so much more highly than those privatised in New South Wales and Victoria shows that if an asset seems worth selling then it is worth keeping in the hands of the people of Queensland.

Not to be outdone by himself, when the member for Mermaid Beach was not insulting our Pacific island neighbour Tuvalu, which coincidentally also kept out COVID-19, he was making suspicious remarks like 'anyone can pay for friendly valuations'. Of the Queensland Future Fund he said, 'I cannot believe the ratings agencies will fall for this three-card monte trick'. That is not only an insult to the professionalism of the ratings agencies but also flies in the face of their published opinions on Queensland. Other members of the LNP shared his opinion.

In their ratings action of 31 March, Moody's—the same agency that downgraded Queensland to a negative outlook under the LNP—said—

Governance considerations are material to Moody's assessment of Queensland's credit profile, taking into account its strong institutional framework and prudent financial planning. The establishment—and in time seed funding—of the Queensland Future Fund also supports Moody's view of Queensland's strong governance. Its public policy has demonstrated a discipline to repay debt, supportive of the state's broader debt management practices.

Just as the opposition has claimed that the debt reduction measures do not go far enough because we are not selling assets, they also suggest that the savings measures are inadequate because we are not making the savage cuts that an LNP administration would unleash. As I said in my

opening remarks, the four-year \$3 billion savings and debt plan had already achieved \$367 million in savings by December last year. I will provide a further update on the program when I present the state budget in just under three weeks time.

However, the measures outlined in the bill seek to deliver up to \$3 million in direct savings per year and significant further indirect savings. Importantly, the changes set a foundation for further reform to the Public Service to deliver ongoing savings. As the then deputy under treasurer said to the Economics and Governance Committee, the measures and initiatives within the bill 'signal the intent to continually reform and improve the management of public finances and the optimal structures for the functions the government undertakes.' In the post-COVID world we can and must do things differently. Our government's \$367 million of announced savings to date demonstrate that.

Yet those opposite bleat about the inadequacy of the additional \$3 million in savings. 'It means nothing. \$3 million is nothing', said the member for Chatsworth. Opposition member after opposition member said that \$3 million was light on, it was inadequate, it meant nothing to them. I can tell the House that it means something to the people of Queensland. If \$3 million means nothing to the LNP then the election commitments they made to their local communities must mean nothing to them too. If \$3 million means nothing to the LNP then the promise made by the member for Kawana of \$200,000 for the Kawana Surf Club must mean absolutely nothing to him and to his community. If \$3 million means nothing to the LNP then the election commitment made by the member for Toowoomba South of \$500,000 to the Darling Heights Community Hub at Darling Heights State School must mean nothing to him and nothing to them. If \$3 million means nothing to the LNP then the promise made by the member for Ninderry that the Coolum Police Station should be upgraded with a \$2.7 million investment must mean nothing to him and nothing to that community. If \$3 million means nothing to the LNP then the promise made by the member for Burleigh, who waxed lyrical about the flaws in the bill, must mean nothing to him because he promised \$500,000 to that community to upgrade the Burleigh Heads walking track. On and on it goes. You could cut the hypocrisy with a knife.

I have outlined the rationale for integrating the Queensland Productivity Commission within Queensland Treasury. It will sharpen the focus on productivity and regulatory reform as part of the government's economic reforms. I note that in 2015 when the Productivity Commission was created the member for Coomera worried aloud that it might be just 'a toothless tiger', that it may be 'just a name' and 'unable to do anything'. I would like to assure the member for Coomera that by integrating the QPC within Queensland Treasury we are only further sharpening the teeth of the government's productivity agenda.

**Opposition members** interjected.

**Mr DICK:** They are awake, but they are not awake to the double standards of saying that \$3 million means nothing to them and the raft of commitments that they made to their communities during the election. What if the member for Kawana had said to the Kawana Surf Club, 'I won't give you \$200,000; I will give you \$3 million.' Can members imagine what that community would have thought about that? They would not have thought that \$3 million was worth nothing. They would have thought that was a sound investment in their community. Their double standards are sickening. Speaker after speaker said that \$3 million means nothing. I say this to members opposite: you can go down to Logan Central Plaza in the middle of my electorate and talk to the battlers there who balance a book every week on their pension and say to their face that \$3 million means nothing. You say that to them. You go down the main street of Kingaroy—

**Mr BLEIJIE:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. There are longstanding rules about addressing members in this chamber through the chair and on six occasions the Treasurer has not addressed his commentary through you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Kelly): Treasurer, I remind you to put your comments through the chair.

**Mr DICK:** I say to the members of the LNP: you go down the main street of the largest community—

**Opposition members** interjected.

**Mr DICK:** Members opposite should walk down the main streets of the largest communities in their electorates. The member for Kawana should stand outside the largest shopping centre in the Kawana community and speak to every single person who comes out and say to them, '\$3 million means nothing to me.' I challenge every single member of the LNP to do that. They say one thing in here and they say something else in the community. Our government values every single dollar. Our government will make that work for Queenslanders. We will do that for everybody who supported us in the last election to get the best economic recovery possible in response to COVID-19.

Members opposite voiced similar concerns about the integration of Building Queensland, which is another sensible move that provides a more coordinated and strategic infrastructure advisory and assurance function within government. However, I note that other than describing the provisions of the bill no LNP member—not one—commented on the Public Safety Business Agency being integrated within the QFES. They are embarrassed to comment on the PSBA because it exposes their drive to privatise the public emergency properties of the Queensland government.

The LNP were also mute on the bill's proposal of a fee unit model. They were condemning the lack of red-tape reduction constantly, but not one member commented on that. That reform stands to save hundreds of hours of Public Service time, updating dollar value fees. Again, the LNP are afraid to talk about fees and charges, because under the LNP fees and charges escalated by 11 per cent in three years. By contrast, the indexation, under the Palaszczuk Labor government is just 1.7 per cent, the lowest in a decade.

We have made a number of changes that we intend to implement across the public sector. This bill will make a significant reform to the administration of the public sector. It will save money, it will make government more efficient and, most importantly, it will support Queensland as we charge our way away from COVID-19 and deliver a strong economic response for Queensland. I commend the bill to the House.