




Speech By  
**Daniel Purdie**

**MEMBER FOR NINDERRY**

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Record of Proceedings, 25 May 2021

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

 **Mr PURDIE** (Ninderry—LNP) (3.11 pm): As a member of the Economics and Governance Committee, I rise to speak to the Debt Reduction and Savings Bill 2021, which is arguably Labor spin doctors' finest work. Last September, as part of the COVID-19 Fiscal and Economic Review, the Queensland Treasurer told Queenslanders that \$3 billion would be saved over four years via the Queensland Future Fund and a review of whole-of-government resource and agency functions. At a public briefing on the bill the committee heard the truth from the Deputy Under Treasurer that just \$3 million worth of savings has been identified—a far cry from the \$3 billion the Treasurer had spruiked. This was not the only shock for the committee. In fact, the public briefing gave the committee less than 50 minutes to consider the amendment or repeal of 18 acts of parliament. It is just like Labor to rush, to not meaningfully consult and to ram through a raft of cover-ups.

Even though Jackie Trad's brainchild, the Queensland Future Fund, is just 18 months old, it already needs a financial makeover in light of asset losses. The Treasurer's hope to make some cash following a government resource and agency review can only be described as a complete farce, considering that the result was the proposed abolition of the state's independent economic review body, the Queensland Productivity Commission.

Queenslanders do not need any more evidence that this Labor government misled and misrepresents them. Here we are again, listening to more outrageous claims about economic recovery when, in reality, there is nothing in this bill that will actually reduce Queensland's debt or deliver significant savings to the public purse.

The hallmarks of this bill simply show Labor's capacity for financial manipulation, commonly referred to as 'cooking the books'. This bill is not about the Queensland economy. That is a tale Labor would have you believe. The mere fact that not one Queensland business or economic community spoke to the committee about the bill is one of the many red flags.

Let us go back to where the deception began. When introducing the bill the Treasurer trumpeted the following words of wisdom—

Those dollars mattered, hard work matters, prudence matters and savings matter. That is a lesson that I am now applying as the Treasurer of Queensland. It is a lesson that lies at the heart of this bill.

That is ironic. I put to the Treasurer that his money lesson is not at the heart of this bill and suggest that instead the matter at the heart of this bill looks a lot more like 'deception matters'. In his speech the Treasurer's words of wisdom morph into a delusional claim. He said—

This bill represents a comprehensive reform of the business and the balance sheet of the Queensland government.

I put to the Treasurer that misrepresenting the truth is not reform; it is a cover-up. Finally, the delusional claim transcended into a scam, one embodied in the very title of the bill. The Treasurer said—

The Debt Reduction and Savings Bill 2021 is designed to do exactly what the title says: reduce the burden of debt and deliver savings.

As a member of the committee that reviewed the bill and considered 15 stakeholder submissions and attended public hearings, I can say that it does absolutely none of those things. This is just another meaningless, lofty claim from this deceitful government. This bill simply demonstrates that the Palaszczuk government has no idea how a balance sheet actually works, which is also why its members cannot reconcile fact and fiction. The fact is that at the hands of those opposite the state's revenue was \$12.3 billion lower than predicted and the state's debt is forecast to reach \$130 billion in just two years.

This omnibus bill is Labor's way forward to get Queensland out of the economic mess it put us in. What is the plan? Assign an arbitrary value to the Queensland Titles Registry of \$4.1 billion and not explain how? Transfer what was once a fiscal liability, the Queensland Future Fund, as Registry Co and list it as an asset? The committee did not hear the basis for the inflated value of the Titles Registry, despite asking. When compared to New South Wales's and Victoria's leases on their titles offices, at a value of \$2.6 billion and \$2.8 billion respectively, \$4.1 billion simply does not stack up.

Labor's plan is that the establishment of Registry Co is then used to offset debt—not pay down debt—so as to improve the revenue ratio in order to satisfy the credit rating agencies but, with an annual interest expense in excess of \$3 billion, the returns on a \$5.7 billion fund would not contribute significantly to pay this expense. Once again, it does not stack up.

AgForce Queensland submitted that the proposal to transfer the Titles Registry would alter longstanding and proven management arrangements and that commercial imperatives to shareholders will increasingly drive decision-making, potentially over the interests of the public good. AgForce submitted that secure title arrangements are so important to the Queensland economy that they should be directly managed by the government.

Together Queensland emphasised its strong opposition to the partial or complete privatisation of any government service such as the Titles Registry, expressed concern that existing corporate knowledge may be lost without careful transition planning and said that assurances must be made that staff are protected from civil litigation.

Turning from the creation of the Queensland Future Fund to another Labor PR stunt, I refer to the Queensland Productivity Commission, the QPC. It has gone from being a Labor election commitment in 2015 to the scrapheap. Why? It is because Labor needs to hide its poor governance record. In fact, following a number of investigations into government business, the QPC released a damning report that demonstrated government productivity had declined since 2015 under Labor. The QPC has been an independent voice raising important public policy issues over the past five years. It has led important reviews in relation to the NDIS, imprisonment and recidivism, red-tape reduction and electricity pricing. Now more than ever, Queensland needs independent voices challenging policymakers on all sides of parliament and at all layers of government.

The Debt Reduction and Savings Bill 2021 also amends the Financial Accountability Act 2009 so that the government is not required to pay to publish public notices in print newspapers; rather, it allows each department to share a notice on their social media page. As if the death knell for print media in isolated regional communities were not deafening enough, removing free access to information is simply a human rights concern. All of the locations listed by the Treasurer as places where government advertising would not be placed in fact boasted locally printed independent newspapers. This is yet another unfounded and lazy claim from out-of-touch Labor as to the real nature of life in regional towns.

The Country Press Association stated at the public hearing that important decisions made by government, mining companies or developers must be shared with impacted citizens and therefore must be published in a public place. It went on to say that the loss of transparency as a result of the amendments is a new liability, not a new asset—indeed, a retrograde step.

In its misguided and deceptive approach to reduce debt and increase savings, other changes proposed in this bill include abolishing Building Queensland, BQ, which was established by the Palaszczuk government in 2015 to improve governance and accountability on major infrastructure projects such as the Gabba and Cross River Rail. Like many other initiatives of this government, BQ was just another PR stunt designed to offer a false sense of confidence. The repeal of the Public Safety Business Agency Act sees the movement of the operations of this agency to QPS and QFES. In a controversial proposal, this bill also sought to make technical amendments to the Medicines and Poisons Act 2019.

Labor has assured Queenslanders many times that it would facilitate the continued functioning of Queensland's institutions and economy 'to the extent possible' in response to the pandemic. It seems it missed 'the extent possible' by about \$2.97 billion. Its glossy, much touted economic recovery plan has completely disappeared. It broke its election promise to borrow \$4 billion and instead increased borrowings by \$2.8 billion which is merely servicing debt and keeping the lights on. The Queensland

economy is consistently the worst performing economy in Australia and the Debt Reduction and Savings Bill 2021 cements this position for the foreseeable future. The title of the bill is a farce and I support the amendment circulated by the member for Kawana. This more accurately should be titled the 'Debt Non-Reduction and Minimal Savings Bill'.