




Speech By
Hon. Glenn Butcher

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

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DEBT REDUCTION AND SAVINGS BILL

 **Hon. GJ BUTCHER** (Gladstone—ALP) (Minister for Regional Development and Manufacturing and Minister for Water) (4.23 pm): I rise in support of the Debt Reduction and Savings Bill 2021. In supporting our state through the impacts of COVID-19, the Queensland government absorbed considerable debt. We did that because it was the right thing to do and many Queenslanders also know that it is the right thing to do. We did it because protecting the lives and the livelihoods of Queenslanders was worth the cost of the state's bottom line. As our state moves towards economic recovery, those debts must be serviced and every part of the Queensland government, including my Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water, has a role to play in finding savings and reducing that debt. That is why this bill and the provisions it contains for my department are so important. However, we do not have to achieve those savings by cutting services or doing less for Queenslanders.

I have seen firsthand what those opposite are capable of doing. During the 2017 election campaign the LNP decided at the time that it would be a great idea to hire a gentleman to work for the Gladstone Ports Corporation by the name of Michael Duggan. Michael Duggan then went on to be the LNP's candidate for the seat of Gladstone during that election. During that time he was employed at the Gladstone Ports Corporation in order to prepare the Gladstone port ready to be sold off, or, as the LNP said, leased for 99 or 100 years. These are the types of provisions that we want to ensure do not happen again, particularly in my electorate.

Not only did we see Michael Duggan run as the candidate for the LNP in Gladstone but also he continued to run a campaign supporting asset sales, particularly ports in Queensland. At the time it was hypocritical that he was employed by the Gladstone Ports Corporation in his role but was also running as the LNP candidate for the seat of Gladstone working towards selling the Gladstone port. And those opposite wonder why they lost the election and suffered a distant loss in the seat of Gladstone, but these were exactly the sorts of things happening in the background of the LNP—that is, it had put in place a board chair that was certainly supportive of prepping the port for an asset sale. We know the LNP's history on this.

One of the biggest issues that I supported during that election campaign was the LNP had land for sale at Calliope that was proposed for a future Calliope high school. However, the LNP said that that block of land would never reach the potential to be a high school. Not only did the Premier and the treasurer at the time ensure we did not sell that block of land for a proposed high school at Calliope; there is now a \$66 million high school delivered for that community on that block of land that those opposite said would never be able to support a high school in the future. These are the types of investments that we know are good for this state and good for kids. These are just a couple of examples that I have seen firsthand in my time as the member for Gladstone in terms of the hypocrisy from those opposite saying that we are the only ones that sell assets. I have seen firsthand what sales those opposite were preparing to do under their government and one can only imagine what those asset sales would have been if those opposite had won government in 2015.

A silver lining to challenges such as these is that they can prompt us to be creative in making these changes, they can prompt us to be innovative and they can also streamline the ways in which we work as Queenslanders. That is how my department is rising to the challenge that is before us. The first of these ways of working is the steps being taken to support one of the key provisions of this bill—the creation of the Queensland Titles Registry as the operator for titles in our state. As other jurisdictions have seen, establishing Titles Registry operations in such a way provides greater opportunity for innovation and investment, better customer outcomes and, importantly, the ability to contribute to debt reduction in this state.

Queensland's water markets also stand to benefit from this opportunity for innovation. The creation of a registrar of water allocations in my department to contribute guidance and oversight to the operation of the Queensland Titles Registry will be an essential step in ensuring the success of this bill. As minister responsible for the Water Act 2000 I am pleased to recommend the amendments that this bill proposes to that act, but they are not the only opportunity for savings through streamlining of government services that my department is enacting either.

At present, the allocation and management of quarry materials is managed across multiple Queensland government departments. This includes the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, the Department of Environment and Science, the Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning, and my own Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water. That is before we even address the interests of the Department of Transport and Main Roads or the Department of Resources in the efficient management of quarries in this state. This function too is ripe with opportunities for streamlining. As a result of this I am proud to lead a process to find opportunities to reduce duplication and to streamline the management of quarries here in Queensland. This process will make a recommendation to government in mid-2022.

A third measure to foster innovation, improve customer experience and, importantly, reduce costs, is my department's implementation of the Building Queensland's Rural Water Future program or, simply put, Rural Water Futures. This three-year priority program is identifying and delivering improvements to how my department meets its responsibilities to oversee the measurement, monitoring and reporting of water that we use right across the state. By adopting innovative digital systems to deliver productivity and efficiency gains, Rural Water Futures will enable business process systemisation and automation. Together this will free staff from routine, low-value, time-consuming tasks, give staff flexibility to work from any location and enable them to focus on high-value inquiries and transactions to deliver improved services to many of our customers here in Queensland, particularly in regional Queensland.

To put it simply, better systems mean more data for water users to make good investment decisions, grow their businesses in regional Queensland and contribute to our rebounding economy; they mean better opportunities for public servants to focus on high-value work that delivers high-quality customer experiences; they mean better outcomes for the environment, ensuring water is managed sustainably and that water users can access their fair share of water; and with the replacement of legacy systems with significant maintenance requirements, and certainly costs, they mean a better outcome for the budget's bottom line. That is a win-win-win-win.

Finally, there is also the small everyday ways my department is delivering savings and contributing to the debt reduction. I am talking about things like using current resources and vacant positions to staff our planned new manufacturing hubs on the Gold Coast and in Mackay rather than seeking new resources. I am proud to say that we will be opening those two facilities on the Gold Coast and in Mackay some time in the near future.

It is the responsibility of every department to do the work of debt reduction and savings as Queensland and the Queensland government recovers from the economic harm that was wrought by COVID-19. We can deliver those savings through innovation. We can deliver them in a way that means better services for Queenslanders and smarter ways of working for our staff. That is how my department is delivering on its responsibilities to find savings and reduce debt here in Queensland. That is the kind of innovation that the Debt Reduction and Savings Bill 2021 stands to foster across all parts of the Queensland government.

I acknowledge the work that the Treasurer and his department, and every other ministers' department here in Queensland, has put towards this bill to ensure that this bill does exactly what it says and that is to reduce debt and deliver savings so that we can continue to do the great work that Labor governments do here in Queensland. We know the great work that we have done in the last six years and the great work we will continue to do in the next six years. The Queensland Labor government will continue to act responsibly with the economy and continue to deliver for those people who have put their support in us over the last six years. On that basis I commend the bill to the House.