




Speech By  
**Laura Gerber**

**MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN**

---

Record of Proceedings, 26 May 2021

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

 **Mrs GERBER** (Currumbin—LNP) (12.18 pm): The Debt Reduction and Savings Bill 2021 is a total con job. It should be renamed the 'cooking the books bill 2021', because when one unpacks it, it creates no substantial debt reduction and no real savings.

This state Labor government broke its election promise to borrow only \$4 billion and instead borrowed \$28 billion. I have heard the Labor members who have spoken to this bill try to suggest that they have introduced it so that Queensland's assets cannot be sold. It was Labor under the Beattie and Bligh governments that sold off Queensland's assets. Labor sold the Port of Brisbane, Labor sold Queensland National Rail, Labor sold Queensland Motorways and Labor sold the Cairns and Mackay airports. I could list another 10 assets sold off by Labor, totalling \$16 billion worth of assets and now we have this bill.

This bill cements Queensland's abysmal economic position and will only continue to promote intergenerational debt that our children and our grandchildren will have to suffer under for years to come. I will be joining my colleagues in opposing this bill because I cannot in good conscience support a bill that is a complete con job. If it actually led to saving hard-earned taxpayer money I would be the first to support it, but this bill is a complete farce. It is a ruse and it is disgraceful.

**Dr Rowan:** Labornomics.

**Mrs GERBER:** I take that interjection. The intention of this bill is to reform the business and the balance sheet of the Queensland government in an effort to make good on the Treasurer's promise to save \$3 billion over four years. What a joke! The bill does none of that. In fact, at the public briefing on the bill the Deputy Under Treasurer told the Economics and Governance Committee that just \$3 million worth of savings has been identified. A sum of \$3 million is a far cry from the \$3 billion that was promised. Those on the other side of the chamber are missing three zeroes. To break it down into conceivable numbers, it is like the Treasurer saying, 'I will save \$100', but then all he saves is \$1. Further, throughout the committee process the Economics and Governance Committee received a mere 15 submissions on the bill. Of those 15 submissions none were from economic or business representatives. It was not worth their time because the bill is a complete farce. There are no savings for anyone to talk about.

This bill is crystal-clear evidence of the Labor government's inability to responsibly manage the state's wallet or to be transparent with Queenslanders, who are the very people counting on this government's now empty and broken promises. The Treasurer said the Debt Reduction and Savings Bill 2021 is designed to do exactly what the title says, that is, reduce the burden of debt and deliver savings. The truth is that there is nothing in this bill that will actually reduce Queensland's debt nor increase significant savings in the public purse.

This bill proposes to transfer ownership of the Queensland Titles Registry to another balance sheet and it attributes an inflated dollar value to the registry in an effort to hide the truth of Queensland's economic woes. The government wants to transfer what was once a fiscal liability to the Queensland Future Fund, call it 'Registry Co' and list it as an asset. The Queensland Titles Registry will now be

listed on the balance sheet of the Queensland Future Fund and assigned the arbitrary value of \$4.1 billion. No basis for the inflated value of the Titles Registry was given, despite committee members asking for it. The titles offices of New South Wales and Victoria are larger than the Queensland Titles Registry so one would think they would have a higher valuation, but those title offices have a market value of \$2.6 billion and \$2.85 billion. The Treasurer has valued the Queensland Titles Registry at almost double that of the New South Wales and Victorian titles offices, which is actually hard to believe.

**Mr Stevens:** Show us the valuation.

**Mrs GERBER:** I take that interjection. Why is the Treasurer going to such lengths to artificially inflate the value of Queensland's assets? It is to try to deceive the credit rating agencies into giving back to Queensland its AAA credit rating or, worse, avoid another credit rating downgrade. Labor's plan is for Registry Co to offset debt, not pay down debt, in a move to improve the revenue ratio to satisfy credit rating agencies.

In their contributions I heard Labor members spruik that the returns of the fund will pay down the interest, but what they are not saying is that with an annual interest expense of over \$3 billion it is unlikely that the returns of a \$5.7 billion fund can make any significant contribution towards paying down that debt. By what twisted definition is this an attempt to reduce debt? Does the Treasurer truly think that the credit rating agencies will fall for this con job? Maybe he thinks he can fool Queenslanders with this deceitful con job.

Here is a history lesson: Queensland lost its AAA credit rating in 2009 under the Bligh government because of Labor's disgraceful economic mismanagement and now they are trying to avoid further downgrades by cooking the books. However, debt continues to grow under this Labor government. It is set to reach almost \$130 billion this financial year. This bill will not help Queenslanders face their increasing economic burdens. Even the fact that the government wants to hide from the scrutiny of the credit rating agencies is proof of their fiscal incompetence because the role of a credit rating agency is to give an accurate reflection of the financial position of the institutes it regulates. If you are hiding from the market then you do not know the true state of your economic affairs. Ultimately, our children and our grandchildren will have to suffer under the burden that Labor has created.

Another concerning aspect of this bill is that it further reduces transparency with the closure of two of the few remaining independent bodies to provide economic oversight and advice. Quite frankly, this state Labor government cannot afford to be any less transparent and needs all of the economic advice it can get. The bill scraps the Queensland Productivity Commission. There are few well-intended reasons that the Labor government could possibly have for scrapping such an important and independent voice in public policy review. This is a blatant and arrogant attempt by the Labor government to further decrease transparency and hide the glaring mistakes of their past, not least of which is declining government productivity under Labor leadership since 2015—if not the past 25 or 30 years.

The Queensland Productivity Commission has been a key voice in proposing policy reforms to government, offering insight and opportunities for improvement through the review of important policy issues such as electricity prices, the NDIS scheme and service delivery to remote Indigenous communities. Maybe the Productivity Commission is getting the boot because they did their job and provided oversight and this Labor government does not like receiving reports that lay bare their failings. When Labor creates an independent statutory body and gets transparency they do not like, they scrap the statutory body that they created. They merge it into a government-run body so that they can control the narrative.

The Debt Reduction and Savings Bill 2021 also proposes to amend the Financial Accountability Act 2009 to remove the need for government to publish public notices in newspapers, instead proposing that such notices are shared on the department's social media pages. To me that shows just how out of touch they are with the needs of Queenslanders, especially those in regional communities. All of the non-printing locations listed by the Treasurer to justify this proposal have locally printed independent newspapers that rely on the publication of public notices as part of their revenue base. The Country Press Association made a submission to the committee on the importance of sharing public information in a public space to inform impacted citizens. The government has a duty to support businesses and communities in regional Queensland and to ensure that everyone has access to public notices.

I regret to inform those sitting on the edge of their seat wondering if there is something redeeming in this bill that there is absolutely nothing positive to talk about. There is nothing in this bill that will reduce debt or increase savings. It is painfully clear that this bill highlights a pure inability on the part of the Labor government to deliver debt reductions or savings to the people of Queensland. This bill is a complete con job and I cannot support it.