




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (2.12 pm): I rise to make my contribution on the 2021-22 budget bills. This budget is like every other I have seen over the last few years. It includes some really welcome spending on important issues, but there is so much more that it does not do. It is the case year after year that these budgets represent a missed opportunity for Queenslanders.

This budget was an opportunity for Labor to show some courage and for bold ideas to drive our economic recovery, but they are playing it safe instead. Playing it safe might be great as an election strategy but Queenslanders deserve more than that. They deserve funding commitments that stand up to scrutiny—unlike the renewables and social housing numbers the government is touting—and they deserve a government with the courage to make big corporations pay a fair share.

The fact is that over the last financial year, the wealthiest corporations in the state only got richer. Mining corporations still exported a whopping \$45 billion worth of resources from Queensland. Despite all the talk about royalties falling, coal royalty figures are comparable to what they were as recently as 2015 or 2016. When the QRC, or whoever else it is that is writing the government's talking points for them, says those corporations cannot afford to pay a little bit more—in fact, they deserve a freeze on royalties—it is nonsense.

It is not just mining royalties. Labor's Victorian colleagues have recently introduced a developer tax, just like we have been proposing for years. That could raise billions of dollars in a budget like this. They could raise more than a billion dollars a year by imposing a modest levy on the big banks, just like their South Australian counterparts proposed. The reason this budget does not include higher mining royalties or a levy on big banks and developers is not because of COVID and it is not because these corporation cannot afford it, it is because those corporations own Labor, just like they own the LNP.

I wonder if that is also why they have to preface every commitment to renewable energy with a desperate reassurance that they still back fossil fuels. They are clearly still trying to walk that line between working with the environment sector and appeasing their big coal donors. Do not get me wrong, it is great that the government is finally putting some extra money towards renewables, but the numbers we have heard are phony. Despite all the media announcements about the \$2 billion Renewable Energy and Hydrogen Jobs Fund, that is just not what the budget says. Only half the much hyped \$2 billion fund is actually committed before the next election and just \$500 million of that is actually new money. The other half was already allocated under a different name. Instead of \$2 billion we are only looking at one quarter of that amount that is new and committed in this budget.

I will leave aside the fact that we need far more ambitious investment in publicly owned renewables for the moment, but if it is \$500 million of new money, why not just say that it is \$500 million of new money rather than peddling overinflated figures. I acknowledge and applaud the \$145 million of

spending on renewable energy zones, including \$5 million of new money, to connect more renewables to the grid. Now, \$500 million or \$5 million, whatever it is, of new money is better than nothing, but it is completely undermined by the government's support for new coal and gas.

Last budget in 2020-21 Labor oversaw Stanwell and CS Energy spend \$312 million just on upgrades, maintenance and overhauls for the publicly owned coal-fired power stations and the publicly owned coalmines that feed them. This financial year they will spend another \$229 million keeping those power stations going. That is more than CleanCo will spend on building new renewable energy. It is also more than the \$225 million to be spent from the newish Renewable Energy and Hydrogen Jobs Fund.

If the government spends \$200 million, as one estimate has it, of taxpayer dollars rebuilding the exploded coal-fired power station, it would be just throwing good money after bad. We know that early closures will be necessary for the government to meet its 50 per cent renewable energy target by 2030. Dividends from coal and gas based generators, Stanwell and CS Energy, are projected to decline to zero by next year's budget anyway.

Instead of patching up the out-of-date technology at Callide, we have proposed spending \$150 million building a big battery to replace the C4 turbine and using the remaining \$50 million to help those workers whose jobs would be affected. They should have the option of a job in another coal-fired power station while they are open, redevelopment elsewhere in the state government, retraining or early retirement for old workers as we have seen happen overseas.

Coal workers and communities have help build this state so they deserve a fair go and they deserve a predictable, just transition into the future. Ultimately, without a plan to phase out coal and gas by 2030, including closing our coal-fired power stations and retraining or redeploying workers in the resources industry, Queensland will fall behind both economically and on our inadequate climate targets.

We also know we are falling behind on the nationally agreed 17 per cent protected areas target for the state. Far from investing to help grow our national parks, in this budget the capital purchases from the Department of Environment and Science will actually decline by more than a third from \$98.6 million to \$61.1 million in 2021-22. Of that spend, the amount going to acquire new protected areas and Great Barrier Reef island national parks will drop by nearly half from \$9.6 million to \$5.3 million.

Honourable members interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Gerber): Pause the clock. The cross-chamber chatter will cease.

Mr BERKMAN: That is despite the government going to the last election boasting about their 10-year plan to accelerate the growth of protected areas. For a bit of context, that spending on new national parks is less than 10 per cent of the money that the government is spending over the next two years on making big Hollywood movies in Queensland.

On social housing, I welcome the rhetorical commitment from the government after many years of urging by the Greens and the housing sector. It is great that the government has admitted that their Housing Strategy from 2017 was not enough. Accepting the truth is the first step in lots of very good programs. We welcome that.

It does not take a bleeding heart lefty like me to figure that out when there are 47,000 people on the waiting list, with more than 14,000 people in the very high need category as at June 2020. Just like the renewables numbers, when it comes to the government's housing commitments, the devil is in the detail. Even if we believe that the government can deliver the 6,300 social homes they are promising, we know that will not come close to meeting the full extent of the need.

Perhaps even more than social housing what is important to this government is that they build enough prisons to maintain their tough-on-crime image that they are cultivating for the Far Right. The Parole Board is completely overloaded. Instead of wondering how we can prevent so many people going to prison in the first place, they are going to fork out \$654 million for a new one and—this is particularly bleak—spend \$8 million to put bunk beds in existing cells. When children as young as 11 years old are sleeping in adult watch houses because detention centres are overcrowded, instead of raising the age of criminal responsibility or reducing the number of kids held on remand, they slap GPS trackers on some of them and throw others in a new short-term remand centre.

One thing I am pleased to see in the budget is funding for a new residential drug and alcohol treatment program for young people. I would like to hear more about this—about who will be eligible, how it will be reviewed and whether there are plans to expand this initiative. This is the crucial other side of the youth justice coin, but \$7.7 million for just 10 beds falls so far short of what is needed.

Around 76 per cent of children subject to supervised orders are dealing with substance misuse issues. Illicit drug offences account for 11 per cent of all offences committed by children. It is heartbreaking and confounding that we still criminalise children, or anyone for that matter, for a health issue like drug abuse. If we decriminalise drugs, we would have about 1,500 fewer people in Queensland's prisons right now. Perhaps we could spend that \$624 million I mentioned before on more alcohol and other drug treatments instead of a new prison. In fact, I wish we were spending the \$3 million that is going to new GPS trackers or the \$16.3 million this year for a new youth prison on more programs like this—programs that deal with the root causes of offending, not bandaids for a gaping wound at the end of the day.

If the government want to push this as a 'traditional Labor budget', I assume they will stand by all of their choices including the choice to leave Queensland state schools underfunded, at just 88 per cent of their needs based funding. We are still the third worst state or territory in the country, and the government does not have a plan to get us to 100 per cent. They have again ignored the calls from the Queensland Teachers' Union to fully fund state schools. Fully funding public schools means smaller class sizes, more teachers and teacher aides. It should also mean free school breakfasts and lunches and abolishing fees for public schools. I would love to see kids at Toowong, Indooroopilly, Ironside, Milton, Fig Tree Pocket, Bardon and Rainworth rolling in before school for a free breakfast and taking the stress out of school lunches for parents all over Queensland.

I would love to see school students using public transport for free. This budget leaves me once again wondering why this has not already been done. The government spent more than \$1.7 billion on public transport in South-East Queensland over the last financial year but collected only \$221 million in fares. That is not even 12 per cent of the total cost of these services—12 per cent of the total cost of public transport services. The big spending on Cross River Rail is great, but we will never get the most out of our public transport systems without it making it more affordable, or even free.

I will turn to some local budget allocations particularly in relation to local schools and transport spending in Maiwar.

Ms Grace: Free food, free housing, free environment, free education, free transport—everything is free! Free, free, free!

Mr BERKMAN: It is treated like a joke that a government could actually choose to prioritise the things that people need to make their lives better in Queensland. It is just insane.

The budget of course includes the previously allocated funding for the proposed new school in Maiwar which has become probably the biggest local issue in my electorate at the moment. It is clear to pretty much everyone that we desperately need this school to take pressure off the local primary schools, particularly Indooroopilly, Ironside and Toowong state schools.

It is equally clear that the decision a couple of decades ago to sell off land that was once the Taringa State School was an incredibly short-sighted decision. Yes, that school shrunk pretty dramatically through the nineties, and anyone who remembers that site in between Moggill Road and Morrow Street, would agree that it is not exactly an ideal location for a primary school, but the failure to plan ahead and acquire land for an alternative site is coming back to bite the department now.

I will put on record again my view that the government should stump up and buy land for the school site or at the very least offset any impacts on greenspace at the site they ultimately choose. I know this is a view shared by most in my community, and I wrote to the Treasurer asking for funds for this purpose. The same increase in population that is driving the need for a new school means our existing schools and greenspaces are all the more precious. It makes no sense to continue to carve them up in the search for a new school site. The pool of funds for land acquisition looks to have dropped to \$120 million in this budget—down from the \$146 million allocated in the last budget.

Honourable members interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Gerber): Pause the clock. Order, members! Comments will be put through the chair. I will tolerate a level of interjection so long as I can still hear the member on his feet.

Mr BERKMAN: As I was saying, the pool of funds for land acquisition has dropped by some \$26 million in this budget, but I would urge the government to keep up the search for land to locate the school and, again, at least offset any impacts on the ultimately selected site.

I am sure I am not alone in the view that a riverside park at the old ABC site would make a fine substitute for any parkland impacted near Toowong. The \$65 million allocated for the new school looks to me to have shrunk to more like \$61 million in the line item I found. That said, the minister's very helpful spreadsheet for all the school spending in Maiwar still says \$65 million, so I am sure I will hear an explanation for that sometime soon.

I am absolutely chuffed to see \$4 million allocated for upgrades to the administration facilities at Indooroopilly State School over the next year—a development that I am sure principal Deb Spanner and the rest of the admin team will be very grateful for. Funding is ongoing for upgrades at Indooroopilly State School and Ironside State School out-of-school-hours care facilities.

The final funding is delivered this year for new classrooms that are well on the way at Milton and Toowong state schools. I cannot wait to see the finished product at both of these schools. Scaffolding was off the buildings at Milton the other day. I am sure that Paul Zernike and Brendon Madden, the principals there, cannot wait to get kids and teachers into those classrooms and perhaps even more so to clear out the construction sites on their school campuses. All this growth in local schools is a consequence of the significant growth in Maiwar and points to the very real need for major investment in better public and active transport infrastructure.

There is ongoing funding for accessibility upgrades at the Auchenflower train station, with \$12 million to be spent this financial year. Unfortunately, there is still no commitment or funding to upgrade Taringa station, but I will keep making the case. Given just how well used that station is and how rundown the facilities have become and how completely inaccessible it is—there are massive long stairwells to get to any of the platforms—we have to see funding for an upgrade in the near future.

There are significant allocations again for the Centenary Bridge upgrade. Unfortunately, the government's inexplicable decision to rule out bus lanes on this bridge means it will not significantly cut congestion or make public transport better in the long term.

I was really glad to see state funding to design a shared cycle and pedestrian path to link the Centenary Cycleway and the new Indooroopilly Riverwalk. Now that the riverwalk is finalised, this missing link is all the more important.

There is a \$500,000 funding allocation to design the Indooroopilly Shopping Centre bus station upgrade, with \$150,000 of that allocated this year which is great to see.

There was unfortunately no funding for the Indooroopilly Bikeway stages 3 and 4 along Lambert Road. Anyone who has tried driving around that neighbourhood at school drop-off and pick-up times knows how desperately we need those bike lanes, especially in light of that area being the location for the new school.

I am yet to see any funding allocated for safety and pedestrian upgrades to MetRoad 5 or the Bardon roundabout, despite the fact that this is one of the biggest issues for people in my electorate. I look forward to discussing that with the department in coming weeks.