



Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BONNEY

Record of Proceedings, 31 August 2021


APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation Bill

Health and Environment Committee, Report

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (5.38 pm): Once again we have seen this government which always promote their environmental credentials, but it is all talk with very little delivery. We started the estimates hearing day with the release of the Climate Action Plan 2020-2030. It turns out it was just a website. I have no idea how that took nine months to put together. The action plan did not include any new policies, strategies or interim targets. This was one of Labor's key election commitments to the environment, but there was nothing to it at all. What the new website does clearly show, however, is that Queensland's carbon emissions are still higher than when Labor came to government in 2015 and that they are not even halfway towards reaching their 2030 reduction pledge.

I did struggle to get the minister to admit that emissions are higher under Labor than when they came to government. The closest I could get was confirmation that the 2019 figure of 164.5 million tonnes is a larger amount than the 2015 figure of 162.7 million tonnes. The government can set all the targets they want but, when it comes to achieving them, they are having very little success. They need to admit to the issues they are having if they want to genuinely drive down emissions and do our fair share of reducing Australia's impact on the environment, because we are lagging behind every single other state.

We found out that the environment department itself is not even carbon neutral and it does not have a plan to become carbon neutral, an astonishing admission for the arm of government responsible for directing Queensland's climate action. Becoming carbon neutral would signal to the community that they are willing to take measures to reduce their impact and not just ask it of others. The 17 per cent target for protected areas was reaffirmed, and again the government is not even halfway towards achieving it. With protected area increases of just 0.01 per cent a year, the hearing revealed that the department could not even give a time frame for when they would achieve this commitment, simply saying it was a long-term ambition. There are again no interim targets and no more information or plans on how they will get there. They have just set a target with nothing to back it up.

The election pledge to investigate re-establishing a standalone environmental protection agency has seen little progress, with consultation not even starting and no time line as to when we will see any progress on it. The flagship Land Restoration Fund has so far only expended \$2.7 million of the \$500 million committed to it over four years ago—and that is not even a rounding error. That is just 0.0054 per cent. Worse still, the government is using the LRF to say the federal government should

match their funding to protect the Great Barrier Reef. Not only have they not spent the money they are calling on the federal government to match, but when you look at the Great Barrier Reef it is clear that the federal government is leading the way. Over the same time period, the federal government spent over \$2 billion on the reef compared to the state's \$970 million. It is just playing politics for this government to present themselves as the ones taking environmental action when all they have really been successful in doing is making announcements.

The organic waste strategy was due by June and still has not been released. Councils and industry are crying out for policy certainty and support to help better manage what is almost half of our residential landfill. Even the director-general admitted during the hearings—

It is clear, frankly, that we are behind other states in terms of the processing and beneficial re-use of organic waste.

Organic waste is one of the practical steps we can take to reduce our impact. Other states are putting millions and millions behind this, and estimates show that all we are doing in Queensland is FOGO trials for kerbside collection totalling just \$770,000. Other states have sorted this out and are investing serious money. We are so far behind and there seems to be no urgency to get us to where we need to be. We are also waiting on the waste to energy guidelines following the release of the strategy, which again makes it impossible for industry to plan. That means the Remondis waste to energy plant could take 10 years from conception to opening, which is twice as long as it would in any other jurisdiction.

When it came to the waste levy, the minister recommitted to it not having a direct impact on households despite not committing to the annual payments to councils, which is preventing this \$70 to \$90 cost per household being passed on. While the minister was happy to promote and comment on the Resource Recovery Industry Development Program, she could not comment on why so little of this fund had been spent—just \$34 million of the \$100 million, even though \$811 million worth of applications were made to it. That is in the context of businesses typically spending \$15,000 to \$50,000 on their applications, so it is not good enough.

Overall, Queensland's environment is our biggest asset and it deserves so much more from our state government.