




Speech By
Sandy Bolton

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

Record of Proceedings, 17 June 2021

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (8.30 pm): In rising to respond to the 2021-22 appropriation bills I have a question: is the word ‘appropriation’, which means a sum of money or assets devoted to a special purpose, appropriate given that it is in large part borrowings? In the journey out of the economic disaster of COVID we knew we were going to have this debt, as many other governments do.

Economic analysis suggests that the Queensland government’s economic recovery plan has set the foundations for a budget with a transition from short-term support and stimulus to longer term productivity and competitiveness to drive private sector growth and jobs. This is a positive and, due to record low global interest rates, it is cheaper to service debt and borrow to rebuild. As always though, the devil is in the detail and in the application for effectiveness.

The predominant call from our businesses as part of getting our economy back on track is for industries such as tourism, which suffered the greatest impacts, to regain travel confidence. This comes from knowing that borders will not close whilst you are holidaying, lockdowns being minimal, appropriate quarantine facilities being available and vaccines being accessible including having a choice of them.

In the first readings, this budget appears to have something for everyone, including opportunity through funding packages and initiatives. Within my own electorate we had welcomed announcements including for our schools, Noosa council capital works and organisations to provide supports. The omissions I trust will be accommodated within these other funding pools as they are essential going forward, and I will speak on these.

Without international workers we need a concerted effort to utilise our own backpackers and unemployed via training, with job security versus casualisation. It is not the first time I have brought up the need to rebrand our key industries of hospitality as careers, and it requires a new focus from schools, governments and industry. May some of the funding provided via the \$320 million for Skilling Queenslanders for Work and the \$100 million investment in the JobTrainer Fund incorporate customised training of hospitality related jobs.

Noosa is one of only two regions in Queensland where tourism is the major employer yet it has not benefited from any recent initiatives including the Holiday Dollars vouchers which Brisbane and the Gold Coast were issued. Given the Noosa electorate per head of population traditionally has more international visitors than the Gold Coast or Brisbane, with a current loss to our economy equivalent to the Gold Coast, a percentage of loss in visitors and spend equivalent to other regions, a critical staffing shortage due to one of the tightest vacancy rates and Queensland’s most expensive housing market—it is vital that we are able to access initiatives.

With Indigenous tourism very much in demand, within the budget, and appreciated, was a further allocation for the Cooloola Great Walk, which is a partnership with our Kabi Kabi in providing unique cultural experiences through these beautiful areas via our young custodians.

Building our economy includes diversification and ensuring we are not reliant on international sources for essential products and to increase what we can export. With our upcoming efforts in Noosa to brand our iconic name as much more than a destination, funds will be required by organisations such as FAN for cold storage facilities and ongoing grants for our businesses to increase outputs. It was good to see over \$3 billion for the Queensland Jobs Fund and \$350 million Industry Partnership Program in the mix to assist in this, as well as plenty of small business grants.

From my own committee's inquiries and hearings into bills, it has become clear that there is a need to have consistent mandated components in the curriculum focused on healthy relationships and mental wellbeing from the very start of our children's education. Whilst this budget does provide essential funding for school infrastructure and maintenance upgrades, I have yet to unearth whether extra funding has been allocated to address inconsistencies. Appreciated is the Local School Local Jobs as part of transitioning our youngsters into the workforce. Did I mention that hospitality is a fabulous career?

An increase to policing is always welcome. Noosa's transition to mobile police units versus our two police beats has not had the best of starts, with two assaults in two weeks within the Hastings Street precinct and a delay in response times. We must have the resources to keep people safe and hold offenders accountable. I trust that, within the increases, the Sunshine Coast region is accommodated and that the integration between the QPS and QPWS systems is fast-tracked so we can finally prevent offenders on our North Shore from accessing permits.

Tewantin Bypass needs to be completed by 2024 to see an end to the bottlenecks, and delays to stage 2 will see double the amount of traffic enter into the 'straights', requiring release at the other end. With stage 1 having happily commenced, the Eumundi-Noosaville end now needs those detailed designs and the funds to do it.

All in this chamber are familiar with the greatest systems failure I have encountered. Haulage routes in our hinterland assessed independently as not being suitable for 40 to 80 trucks per day at times have loads of more than 200. The danger and trauma to road users, residents, businesses and our infrastructure has been well documented and is unacceptable. Whilst road upgrades are necessary to repair the damage, the environmental authority and associated haulage routes must be reviewed before a tragedy occurs.

An expansion to our emergency department in Noosa Hospital, which in effect acts as a satellite hospital, must be scoped. The flow-on effect from not having capacity to take our emergency cases has led to bypassing ambulances and ultimately adding to the ramping woes at SCUH.

Whilst on health, I stand here again looking for the clinical master plan for the Sunshine Coast to be finished. With needs including Parkinson's nurses, extra counsellors, psychiatrists and psychologists to see an end to lengthy delays for those who are suffering mental trauma and depression, I feel that we are running blind. I can only hope that the \$648 billion allocated to address the pressures from COVID, emergency patient flow and elective surgery waitlists, will somehow cover these, as well as those volunteer first responders to avoid the delays that I have spoken about previously.

It has never been more important to speak on palliative care. It is well documented that our volunteer organisations, including our palliative care hospices such as our much loved Katie Rose Cottage, deliver services at a much more economical cost than available within a hospital. Yet these accredited hospices still do not have an appropriate level of funding, nor did they have a dedicated voice during the inquiry into palliative care.

With voluntary assisted dying being debated this year, ensuring choice of palliative care is vital, and hospices require the surety of a partnership that commits to funding their nurses for 50 per cent in developing a sustainable funding model into the future. A portion of the \$171 million allocated to end-of-life care must be utilised to address this.

This year we commenced our Be: Noosa Connect pilot, utilising volunteers to ensure our frail who do not have the means to access their treatments at SCUH are transported. Already data being compiled is concerning, with the majority seeking assistance having to attend daily treatments for many weeks, leading to the cost to transport each individual at around \$2,500.

We appreciate the funds provided in this budget to Anglicare for those under-65s who are not eligible for transport assistance through NDIS or My Aged Care; however, much more funding is required, especially for the over-65s. In addition, the criteria around the PTSS must be urgently overhauled. My community has faced an unprecedented crisis in housing accommodation which has led to a loss of workers and impacted our economy and our much loved long-term residents and volunteers. This was preventable, and that is why I am angry about it. The current COVID rationale is only part of this story.

I stood in this chamber years before the pandemic outlining what was needed, which included development funds for our community housing organisations and surplus site identification. Some four years later state government land zoned for housing sits unutilised with the rationale on one side being that carbon offsets make it unviable and on other that it is under a native title claim. As the Noosa Housing Action Group continues to implement initiatives, including emergency provisions—and I thank the department for assisting in this—all I ask is that in the establishment of the \$1 billion Housing Investment Fund an allocation be provided to us without the previous barriers and that the state criteria around housing assistance for worker families who are currently not eligible for assistance be changed. The four-year commitment of nearly \$100 million for the housing and homelessness service system is appreciated, and I look forward to seeing what head lease packages are made available to Noosa.

Whilst the rail duplication to Nambour is vital, and it is good to see the commencement of the Beerburum to Beerwah section, so too is the rail shuttle pilot to Gympie. Opportunities within the Noosa and Gympie regions can only be realised when we connect transport to commuters, freight and tourists.

Overall, does this budget provide what my community seeks? In many parts yes, including the opportunity of funding pools to access assistance which may not be large in dollars but makes a real difference. The extra allocations across the state in domestic violence supports, youth justice reforms and concessions are just a small sample and are all very welcome. In addition, the \$42 million over four years to continue the fisheries reform process will raise great interest, as it is always a hot topic in my community. I have not yet found funding to extend SharkSmart and other non-lethal trials to other areas as well as much needed increases for maintaining our national parks, however, I will keep digging.

In closing, I thank the Treasurer, ministers, departments and all involved in compiling this budget. Again your task has not been easy, as across Queensland the diverse needs of our communities can be difficult to accommodate whilst we are still finding our way out of COVID. All efforts are appreciated. Even though the 2021-22 appropriation bills may not have given my electorate some of the specifics sought, they have left the door open. Let me assure you that my foot is planted squarely in the doorway to prevent it slamming shut.