



Speech By  
**Stephen Andrew**


**MEMBER FOR MIRANI**

---

Record of Proceedings, 17 June 2021

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL**

**APPROPRIATION BILL**

 **Mr ANDREW** (Mirani—PHON) (10.32 pm): I rise to speak on the 2021-22 state budget for Queensland. On behalf of the people of Mirani, I would firstly like to thank the ministers for working with me on certain projects. I would also like to extend my condolences to the family of the member for Stretton, Mr Duncan Pegg. He invited me to some of his functions and we had some great times together. The House will be sadder for his loss.

It would seem this budget hangs on a shoestring—being dependent on both fickle weather events and future COVID lockdowns for it to be delivered successfully. With the current debt, it invests Queensland money on hydrogen projects that at this point have no real demand and no imminent return on the investment that is desperately needed at this time. After COVID hit us in 2020 and wiped out small businesses and crippled so many others, Queensland became aware of what is truly essential. Why wouldn't we continue on this path to ensure risk-free stabilisation across the state until the threat of COVID and the impact on our mining and agriculture sector is stabilised? It has given Queensland the foundation that supported us through the COVID crisis.

The electorate of Mirani is home to some of the state's most wealth-generating industries, including sugar, tourism, horticulture, fishing and many of the support industries. Queensland's crucial mining sector is based there. With all due respect to the members present, the needs and concerns of the people of Mirani are very different to the needs and concerns of those in the south-east. One of the biggest concerns we have is the terrible state of our road network. Across the electorate, there are roads in a desperate state of disrepair, and a real program of work is urgently needed to ensure they are safe and fit for purpose for the future. That is why I have been asking for a solid commitment from the state government to repair areas of the Bruce Highway, which is a road that farmers use to haul cane, and also Anzac Avenue, which is a road that transfers visitors to our beautiful Pioneer Valley and Eungella Range. The problem is fast becoming urgent however, with a rash of horrifying accidents and near misses. There have been rollovers of trucks near schools, rollovers on main highways in 100 kilometres an hour zones. The road network has fallen into complete disrepair in many areas.

The Walkerston Bypass funding in the budget was also very welcomed, but as I have said previously the project has numerous design problems and is causing untold problems for farmers in the area that need to be addressed. The current plan forces cumbersome farm vehicles to cross the planned new bypass via a staggered T-intersection and is a big safety concern for local canegrowers. Interaction between slow-moving cane harvesting gear causes fatalities, and this could all be avoided by just listening to growers and making changes. If it is not fixed, this interaction will claim lives during the crushing season when there are more than 220 trips per day crossing the intersection and adding to the existing traffic during peak periods. This is only the beginning in terms of what is needed. We are

in urgent need of funding to address issues on the Bruce Highway. We need new bridges and additional culverts, more lane duplication, increased overtaking lanes and flood proofing of long stretches along the Bruce Highway from St Lawrence north.

Health is another area I am concerned about. I am part of that committee. Queensland faces an unstable future concerning health infrastructure. More than 11,000 people are reported to be moving to our great state every month. The already overburdened health system and crime issues are deep concerns which are continually spoken about by my people. Regional hospitals are crying out for more beds, more medical staff and more supplies. More than that, I am hearing people all over the region calling for much more transparency around the health sector. I have heard stories concerning some older people recently, and my father was one of them. He went in for a normal procedure and spent nine days in intensive care. Another lady said that her husband went in for a procedure and did not come back out, and she still does not know why. It is not the fault of the health staff or hospital staff. They are doing the best job they can with what they have. I cannot praise them enough for the work they have been doing. It is just that the whole system is overloaded and we do not have the resources or the workers they need to keep up sometimes.

We are also seeing a noticeable lack of adequate community and social infrastructure, and this is becoming critical. Even the member for Mackay would be able to say that. People working in the community up there are saying that they are being hit with a huge surge of unmet demand for services and are dealing with a huge volume of people suffering economic hardship, homelessness, health issues and job losses. I heard last week that 478 people in my area—most of them mothers with children—were being evicted but could not find places to rent because of economic hardship. They cannot afford the rent rises and what is going on in the state. They are living in cars and couch surfing at the moment. That is mums with kids. We are seeing that many people are still struggling and we need the government to throw a lot more effort and finance towards that area so we can work through that.

The Mirani electorate also provides critical support services for the mining sector at Hay Point and Dalrymple Bay. We are proud to be the home of what I believe are the most resilient sugar and cattle industries in the world. The whole state has reaped and still does reap untold riches from the blood, sweat and tears of our miners, farmers, manufacturers and small businesses. The onus is now on the government to give back some of that wealth to the people who produced it. Mount Morgan is a prime example. It is drought-stricken and urgently needs piping of water up to its No. 7 Dam for the people and also for the opening of the new mine this year. We also need the government's support to ensure that that mine does open and the legacy and the damage of all the poisoning that has occurred over the years is addressed by that mine opening. The mine going in there will help to give jobs to the local economy and fix that legacy.

The same goes for the fireclay caverns in Mount Morgan. The dinosaur footprints are crying out for more investment, the opening up of that area and the support of the government. We have a risk-averse government in that sector that shut those fireclay caverns and we need to work to make sure they are opened again. They are crying out for that tourism investment. It has been an absolute shame to watch that whole thing close. One of the other projects I have been fighting for, and will continue to fight for, is the mountain bike trail also in Mirani that goes from Eungella down to Finch Hatton. That will be a major tourist attraction and help the whole region.

There can be no beating around the bush: Queensland's books are awash with red ink. The state's total debt is expected to jump from the estimated \$95.8 billion this year to \$106.3 billion in 2021-22 before hitting \$127.3 billion in 2024-25. According to the Treasury, the debt interest bill is forecast to reach \$3.4 billion per year by 2024. That is an unprecedented and staggering amount of money which the state will now have to pay each year. Even these alarming figures are heavily reliant on a shaky set of assumptions. Omitted from the calculations are the massive costs we will incur if we win the bid for the 2032 Olympic Games. In fact, if the government thinks the games are going to turn a profit for Queensland, I believe it should pledge to the people of Queensland a dollar-for-dollar investment in infrastructure and water security spend in this state that equals the overall cost of the bid and the holding of the games. That is what I believe. There are also many other rosy assumptions: that interest rates stay at the current low of 0.1 per cent, that there are no more outbreaks of COVID and that the government somehow works out a way to reap dividends from the billions being poured into renewables.

On Tuesday the Treasurer said that all the borrowing is needed to generate growth for the future, but nowhere in this budget did I see any productivity plan or blueprint for reform of our tax system or plans to reduce the regulatory burden that is killing small business and agriculture. Nor are there plans for new ports or any other major water or power infrastructure projects that would help expand the

supply side of Queensland's economy. We could have at least built Rookwood Weir to the level it was actually designed for. That is where we will find real potential for growth and the opportunity to create jobs, investment and wealth for the future.

As it is, Queenslanders have been handed a budget that focuses exclusively on maintaining people's cash flow in order to service their monthly debt payments and keep the state's property and household debt bubble from bursting. Mortgage stress figures are already showing that there are huge numbers of people, especially in the south-east corner, who are most at risk. That is the real reason behind the budget's huge spending: to create enough low-paying dead-end jobs so people have just enough to service their debt obligations. The majority of these low-paying dead-end jobs will be in the service sectors and will destroy more of our middle wage earners over time. Any government can borrow to create low-quality jobs to drive unemployment numbers down, but it is only by investing in private and export sectors that we can hope to provide Queenslanders with real jobs—jobs that are rewarding, secure and well paid. As it stands, with any increase in unemployment figures over the next few years we will quickly see a rise in delinquencies and—

**Mr Saunders** interjected.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Ms Lui): The member for Maryborough will cease all interjections.

**Mr ANDREW:**—defaults that will upset stability in terms of the banks and bring the whole economy to its knees.

All this spiralling debt which the government is using to prop up the 'debt bubble' and the 'green economy' will do nothing to prevent the steep falls we will see in the government revenue, particularly from our coal exports. Oil revenues are falling and we have seen a big drop in LNG royalties as well. Overall, Queensland exports fell 28.4 per cent between 2020 and 2021, with the biggest falls being for mineral fuels and coal, which both fell 38.1 per cent. Lower exports and lower coal prices means billions of dollars less in royalties for the government. With the massive debt the government is carrying the implications for Queenslanders of that sobering fact could be huge. Now more than ever we need a government to step up to support and safeguard the state's most productive and proven wealth-creating industries—the backbone of our economy—and they have failed to do it once again.

There was nothing for resources, mining, agriculture or tourism anywhere apart from a few one-off temporary projects. Even worse, the budget made damaging cuts to the departments responsible for those sectors. The agricultural budget was slashed by 32.5 per cent, tourism lost 24 per cent, and small business and training lost more than eight per cent. The Department of Resources suffered a whopping 47.7 per cent cut to its budget, something not even the loss of the titles office could hope to justify.

The government of Queensland has missed a unique opportunity in this budget, an opportunity to take all the debt and use it to invest in Queensland's real economy—the economy that generates real wealth, drives real growth and creates real jobs for the future. They have missed that opportunity.