



Speech By  
**Stephen Bennett**


**MEMBER FOR BURNETT**

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## **APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL**

### **APPROPRIATION BILL**

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (4.39 pm): As is customary, we give our budget reply speech in this place. We need to encourage long-term economic growth and small business with all Queenslanders, particularly in our part of the world. We need leadership but we need a plan. I cannot accept that we can celebrate applauding short-term creative economic numbers and statistics because it is not a serious fiscal plan.

I want to put on record my thanks for some of the efforts in the budget. The Minister for Education is in the House and I want to acknowledge the emails from her office consolidating the education delivery in the electorate. That is welcome and I thank the minister and her staff for being so forthright. Normally we do not get that support. I thank her very much. I think it is great we can celebrate education in this House a lot more together than we do apart. I think we all share that sentiment.

With that, I would like to acknowledge some of those projects that were announced: \$100,000 for Agnes Water State School block B; \$300,000 for Alloway State School main entrance; \$350,000 for Bargara State School; \$60,000 for Goodwood State School; \$100,000 for Kolan State School; \$500,000 for maintenance; \$300,000 for minor works; and we are delighted with the \$1.2 million for Miriam Vale State School for that amenities block that is desperately needed. We are very grateful for that. Oakwood State School picks up some money as well as Rosedale—\$350,000. We are very grateful for the work that is being done in education around the region.

I want to acknowledge something else in the budget, and the member for Hervey Bay did not mention the Fraser Island issue. However, I think it is important that we acknowledge the minister and the department of environment for putting \$1.2 million into fire mitigation on Fraser Island. I think we all share a passion in our hearts for these iconic national parks and none of us were happy with what happened. I am not apportioning blame; I am just acknowledging the fiscal investment into Fraser Island. It is not in my electorate but it is somewhere I visit on a regular basis. I am looking forward to going there shortly for another week. I thank the minister for that. I think it is important to put that on record.

I also want to acknowledge the money for Lady Elliot Island and their renewables push. It is a truly iconic spot. All honourable members should come and visit. We should all be proud of the Gashes, who have been completely off the grid over a number of years, working with the department; I know they have done some really good work out there. I will be heading there shortly as well.

Turning to our agricultural sector, it is important that I acknowledge the money that was put in for new agriculture and horticulture in the Bundaberg electorate. Of course, we all share agriculture as a key driver for the region. There is money for the five ways down at Childers at Doolbi; we want to make sure that is acknowledged. With all the criticism of Paradise Dam—and I will talk more about that—it is important to note that the money that is still in the budget for the original works and, more importantly,

the other works, the \$32 million that was announced for the planning, all of that continues. Also I think the \$30 million to upgrade power out of Childers is important. Of course, I want to make sure we do acknowledge the importance of the Seasonal Worker Programme. The money that has come from both the federal and state government has to be recognised as important.

This is our seventh year of drought and I think it is really important that the Drought Assistance and Reform Package continues to be a very important issue. It keeps a lot of our farming families viable and robust. I also think that after so many years of fighting for the Bundaberg port, the money has not been taken out around the port conveyer belt, and I want to make sure we give credit where credit is due. That Drought Assistance and Reform Package across Queensland is \$70 million. We just hope we can get through the litany of paperwork that is needed to fill that out. There are some things in the budget that we certainly want to acknowledge but there is plenty to talk about in other areas.

Before I move to other areas, the domestic violence sector does need to be looked at. I want to put in a plug for Hearts of Purple based on the Gold Coast but who are now across the state. They are now in the Bundaberg and the Burnett electorates with their purple bins. I ask those who are coming to the promo night tonight to please have a chat to the team from Hearts of Purple. They are hoping to raise money by getting 10 cents a can to fund things like watches and other surveillance equipment and audits on people fleeing domestic violence. It is a success story, but I think it is a bit sad that we cannot provide more for them.

On the subject of Paradise Dam, we know the options paper will be out later this year and we know that Building Queensland have that before them. It is back in the department now. I have spoken about that before. I did want to express a bit of concern about an announcement. I want to make a point. I am not having a go because it was a Labor Party announcement. Our council has been pushing for an aquatic centre, so I will take them on so I do not get heckled from across the chamber. I cannot believe they want to spend \$45 million in Bundaberg in the middle of a seven-year drought considering Paradise Dam and water security in order to build a new swimming pool.

**Mr Smith:** That's the local council.

**Mr BENNETT:** I did acknowledge that; I take the member for Bundaberg's interjection. I did try to say I will take on the council and not make it something the member would want to interject on. I do say seriously that we do need to get our priorities right. We are in the middle of a drought yet here is a \$45 million swimming pool about to be built. I do think we need to reflect on what we need to do.

I also want to talk about how important the \$19 billion agriculture sector is to the Queensland economy. Of course, our farmers provide everything that is nutritious and safe in food and fibre but, more importantly, the wonderful green credentials that come with that. The agricultural sector is the one that delivers the food security, provides protection to the environment and provides so much to the economy and it is all low risk. We would have liked to have seen more targeted support for that industry. Why not abolish stamp duty on agricultural insurance? We need to establish a discretionary mutual fund for this crop insurance issue that has been kicked around for decades. Let's empower farmers with long-term industry owned tools for managing risk.

What are the problems with the budget? Some of the problems for me are: the Bargara and Hughes road intersection missed out as did the Moneys Creek Lagoon and the environmental catastrophe it is. We need to get on top of that. I need to raise a couple of issues and I will be very happy to be proved wrong. One of the things in the budget papers that concerns us—and it is in the Bundaberg electorate—is the Bundaberg flood levee. I will table last year's SDS statement, which details that the flood levee had \$5.5 million in this budget; \$17 million in next year's budget 2022-23; and \$17 million in the—

*Tabled paper:* Extract from 2020-21 Queensland State Budget—Service Delivery Statements, titled 'Table 1.1 Expense measures', p. 1-5 [901](#).

**Ms Boyd** interjected.

**Mr BENNETT:** I will take the interjection from the member for Pine Rivers. Yes, it is about the Bundaberg electorate, but our electorates are unique in that my electorate surrounds his and we have a lot of common interests in terms of what a flood looks like. I thank the member for Pine Rivers for her interjection, but I suggest that those people in my electorate do not care what she has to say anyway.

I want to get back to our farmers. I want to make sure we talk about crop insurance. Let's empower our farmers with industry owned tools for managing risk.

I also want to raise the \$15 million line item to purchase land for the new hospital. I have several questions. This land that was announced is state land. I do not know why we need to put \$15 million into the budget to buy land from ourselves. If people have been to Bundy, they would know that paying

\$15 million for a parcel of land of some hectares is astronomical. For that amount of money I could buy a thousand-acre macadamia farm with 15,000 trees. I am not sure how this parcel of land has been valued. Maybe we are going to sell it to ourselves and pay down debt. I am not sure.

A lot of my colleagues have talked about issues around the budget for Cross River Rail and the infrastructure spend. This new housing investment is also so important. No matter what we do, we have to deal with this housing crisis. We hope we can all work a bit more collaboratively in terms of what that looks like. As has been suggested with the private sector, let's empower the land bank and let's make sure that these people no longer have to live in their cars—and there are many of them. As has been said here today, there are many people in our own electorates who are moving towns just to find somewhere to live. It is not necessarily anyone's fault; the housing boom is something that has crept up on us all. We have not planned for it and we have not done well. I think we all need to acknowledge that we can do better.

I will never stop talking about the trajectory for debt of \$130 billion. I think it is important that we never take our eye off that. I may just be one of those LNP members who are fixated on debt, but for me it is important. It is serious. I certainly do not want to leave—

**A government member:** Leave him alone. He is trying his best.

**Mr BENNETT:** I am not sure what the interjection of the member for Logan was, but it was certainly intended to be disruptive. I did not want to take his interjection, but I have now. I do not want my grandchildren to have to somehow deal with the repayments of this trajectory of debt.

The week before last, Surf Life Saving Queensland came to town and talked to our council about a wonderful announcement on something we have been fighting for for a decade—that is, funding for a surf club at Moore Park that was wrecked by cyclones in 2010. The council made an announcement on the Wednesday. It appeared on social media that Surf Life Saving Queensland had briefed the council the week before. We just carried on with what we were doing. We were intending to celebrate with the club on the Friday morning. Then there was intervention from the minister's office. My concern is that the minister's office has tried to interfere with the public media in Bundaberg, asking them to take down stories about this announcement. I find the politicisation of this incredibly disturbing. I think there will be more to be said about this. This morning I heard the health minister talk many times about gagging. I am deeply disturbed by this eventuality whereby ministers' offices are trying to dictate to and influence our local media. I find that terrible.

The lack of tourism spending has been raised in this House numerous times today. I find it incredibly rewarding to work with our leader in the tourism space. From travelling around I know that there are a lot of disheartened operators and industry stakeholders out there. I take this opportunity to put on the record a call to members of the government who have influence. Why do we not open up rail travel from the south-east corner into Central Queensland? Hervey Bay, Maryborough, Gladstone, Bundaberg—all of us in that part of the world could certainly benefit from getting more of those tourists who do not necessarily drive or cannot afford to fly—

**Mr Power:** I love the tilt train.

**Mr BENNETT:** Thank you, member for Logan. We should encourage people from the south-east corner into our regions. From a tourism point of view, what a great opportunity that would be. On numerous occasions I have made contact with the minister. I acknowledge that this may not be easy to do, but I ask the minister to think about either free or half-price rail travel into our region so we can capitalise on getting heads on pillows—enjoying the wonderful opportunities and things we all have to offer.

I will not go back over the issues pertaining to the titles office. We certainly will be keeping an eye on that issue. I do not mind admitting that I have some confusion about funding of the housing program and Path to Treaty in this so-called budget. I do not know about others, but I think it is important to address the Leader of the Opposition's request for transparency in budgets. I have now read different budget papers over nine years. This year it is even more confusing. There is less information and there are more things being hidden.

That said, I will give members on the other side of the House the opportunity to explain to me the flood levee money. There was \$45 million promised prior to the election when they had not spoken to the federal government. It is not in this year's budget papers. I think it is really important for the Queensland government to explain why it made a promise for a \$45 million flood levee—

**Mr Smith** interjected.

**Mr BENNETT:** I take the interjection from the member for Bundaberg. I ask him to explain in his contribution where the \$45 million is. The state government's promise of \$45 million for the flood levee was in last year's budget papers but it is not there now. If the funding has been cut, it is important to

say so. I have backed this Labor government on the flood levee every time—it needs to be done—but what I will not accept is when budgets are manipulated to remove the funding. If that is the case, I ask those opposite, who are responsible for that, to at least come clean and tell members of their communities. Before the election they promised \$45 million to build a flood levee and then decided to write to the federal government sometime later. I think that needs to be made transparent. I put those opposite on notice, if they feel comfortable or feel obligated, to at least be truthful about what happened with the flood levee money. If it is gone, they should fess up and let us know what is going on.

I think we now need to look forward and address the promises that were made during the election in relation to mental health services. I would like to see some tangible money in maybe next year's budget, because it is not in this year's budget. Mental health is becoming increasingly important in our regions because of the issues that confront us—things like the lowering of Paradise Dam, reef regulations and so on. There is a lot of pressure in our communities right across a lot of issues. Investment in mental health services is really important. I encourage everyone who has capacity to give our region its fair share.