



Speech By
James Lister


MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

Record of Proceedings, 9 November 2022

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL (NO. 3)

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BETTING TAX AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (4.01 pm): I, too, rise to make a contribution in the cognate debate of the racing tax bill and the appropriation bills. I want to acknowledge my fellow committee members on the Education, Employment and Training Committee as we were the committee that considered the racing tax bill. By and large, I do not have too many problems with that aspect of this cognate debate. It does support Queensland racing. It does assist pubs and clubs with revenue by ensuring that those on their sites that transact wagering are able to secure a commission so that they are not locked out of the traditional sources prior to the advent of the online gaming that we have now. I also acknowledge that this provides certainty to Tabcorp in that it will enable it to continue to be the betting hub of choice for the member for Mermaid Beach.

However, it does concern me that that wicked name Anacta appears to rear its ugly head from time to time, and this is another occasion where it seems that Anacta Strategies had been engaged by Tabcorp to deal with the Palaszczuk government. Whenever there is a suspicion that there is corruption involved in these sorts of things it ought to be spoken about in this House, and it escapes no-one's attention that Anacta Strategies has been a very significant donor to the Labor Party. It was not just of course its dealings with Tabcorp that ultimately led to a settlement with the state government; it was also prominent in the Wellcamp debacle, and that has occupied a great deal of discussion in the House today, particularly from members on this side of the House who have the freedom to question what is an outrageous waste of public funds.

When we look at the \$200-odd million that has been spent on the facility, that represents an enormous opportunity lost. It represents an opportunity to retire some of the great debt that we have incurred in recent years that we are on the road to bequeath to our grandchildren and their grandchildren, which I think is hardly fair. To an electorate like mine in Southern Downs, it also means foregone opportunities for important infrastructure and projects. Naturally, members would expect me to mention Emu Swamp Dam. That \$200 million which has been laid out for a facility that the Queensland government does not own and will not own at the conclusion of the lease could have easily built Emu Swamp Dam. That is a project which will provide water security to the town of Stanthorpe which had to have water trucked to it for 14 months during the height of the drought. It would provide water security to the industries that employ most people in the Granite Belt region, and that is horticulture—growing the fruit and vegetables that we need to provide prosperity for ourselves as well as food and food security for ourselves and our customers throughout Australia and throughout the world. I see that \$200 million which has effectively been blown there as a dreadful waste.

As part of the Wellcamp facility we were drip-fed information about what had gone on there and it had to be dragged out of the government. There was a \$108 million contract drawn up with Aspen, which, like the contract with the Wagners, was done sole source. I am led to believe from reports in the *Courier-Mail* that this Aspen contract had expended about \$16 million at the time that operations at the facility had ceased which represented about \$700,000 a day for a facility which most of the time had almost no people on board, and that was facilitated by Anacta as well. It was again a sole-source procurement which was objected to by other industry players and providers of healthcare services which were not invited to tender. The successful firm, Aspen, had paid Anacta Strategies to undertake representations to the state government. The contract was secured and Anacta Strategies donates money to the Labor Party.

I invite members of this House to imagine how a local government councillor would feel about that degree of corruption and impropriety, because if they were to be involved with taking donations from a lobbyist that had secured a successful contract with the council they would find themselves before the CCC. In fact, I reckon they would find themselves in prison. That sort of thing is an indelible stain on the credibility of this government.

It perhaps would be more easily digested if it actually produced something, but instead we got a white elephant which, by all accounts, has been used as a weapon to try and wedge the previous federal government in the context of a highly contested federal election. The people of Queensland will not thank the Labor government for the \$200 million which was wasted there. It would not just build Emu Swamp Dam; it would also build 350 social houses. In my electorate of Southern Downs, which has just been identified as having the tightest rental market in Queensland in the local government areas of Southern Downs and Goondiwindi, that is an opportunity lost. We could have refurbished all of the hospitals in my electorate, and then some—hospitals like Goondiwindi, Millmerran, Inglewood, Texas, Stanthorpe and Warwick. We need dialysis services. We need decent radiography services.

Mr Dametto: Hear, hear!

Mr LISTER: I take that approval from my good friend the member for Hinchinbrook. These are not academic matters. For the people in my electorate who depend on health services in Southern Downs and who have to go to Toowoomba or Brisbane for treatment, it is a crying shame and that money would have done a great deal of good for us. When I make an observation about a budget item I always try to put it in the prism of the people I represent in Southern Downs and the people of Southern Downs by and large want a tight ship run. We do not object to borrowings if they are for things which will provide value to the people of Queensland and to the state. We do not object to spending when it provides services and when the additional spending that has occurred has improved services rather than what we tend to see with countless millions and billions of dollars thrown at problems, only to find that the problem does not get fixed. Anybody who looks at the government and asks themselves what they are getting from it would be disappointed to see more money spent to get less back in return.

I am disappointed at the degree of additional expenditure that has occurred here which has not gone to worthwhile projects, which has not provided lasting value to the people of Queensland, which has not delivered things like irrigation and water security for my electorate, which has not improved roads like the Cunningham Highway and the Gore Highway. That \$200 million wasted on Wellcamp could have made a real difference and improved the lives of people who live there and improved the economy in my neck of the woods where road transport is king and the cost of trucking is immeasurably increased because of the bad situation of our roads.

I say to the people of Southern Downs that this is a disappointing appropriation; however, it has already been undertaken and therefore the opposition is bound to support it. I will never take a backward step from reminding the government that it ought to use public funds carefully, it ought to restrain unnecessary growth in the size of government and it ought to provide decent services and decent facilities for the people I represent.