



Speech By  
**Lachlan Millar**

**MEMBER FOR GREGORY**


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## **APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL**

### **APPROPRIATION BILL**

#### **REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (3.49 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the budget. To start with, this budget has let down regional Queensland. This has been a budget for Brisbane, not the bush. I will give you a classic example. Over the last couple of years the Central Queensland Hospital and Health Service has been campaigning, working together, to try and bring a new hospital to Blackwater. We have already visited the Blackall Hospital and we have seen that that is the ideal type of hospital we need in Blackwater, yet there is no line item in the budget for the Blackwater Hospital.

What we need in Blackwater is a hospital fit for purpose. Blackwater has a population of 6,000 people, but realistically it has an increased population, through drive-in drive-out and fly-in fly-out, that doubles the population. The hospital in Blackwater does not have capability if an emergency happened at one of the mines, whether it be Curragh or South Blackwater. I call on the minister: if the money is there, show us the line item and show where it is in the budget, because we need a guarantee that this hospital is going to be started this coming financial year. All of the tender documents have already gone out, but where is the money in the budget? You can do the tender documents, but you need to have the money to put someone on. I call on the minister to show me where it is and show me where the money is coming from.

This budget is about spin, smoke and mirrors. It is how things look, not how they are. We have seen reannouncement after reannouncement. The only two new announcements for the outback in the seat of Gregory are \$747,000 for a 50-kilowatt solar system for the Alpha Hospital and Multipurpose Hospital Service; and Diamantina Shire gets a measly \$410,666 to support Diamantina Shire to undertake job-creating maintenance works. In the Central Highlands we get five new announcements: Lilyvale primary plant replacement, \$26.2 million—I thank the government for that; and \$4 million on new buildings and learning spaces for Emerald State High School, which is much needed with the growing population in the Emerald area.

This is the one they tried to sneak through: the Emerald Hospital gets \$8 million for the redevelopment of the emergency and day surgery. Do you know where that money came from? Ten million dollars was given to the Queensland Health department and the Queensland government in 2019 by Ken O'Dowd, who was the then member for Flynn. That \$10 million was given to Queensland Health well over three years ago, and now they are finally putting \$8 million—not \$10 million—into the budget. I think we are being taken for granted out there. Why wasn't that money put into the budget as soon as they got it? We needed that upgrade to the emergency department at the Emerald Hospital three years ago. Finally the government has put the money in. It is money that has come from the federal government.

The Emerald Comet substation received \$1.8 million for protection works and the Springsure State School got \$888,000 for specialist classrooms. This is much needed in the Springsure area. I do thank the government for those initiatives. Let's start spending the money.

If you look at the budget for outback Queensland—and it is a lovely, glossy brochure—there are a couple of things in there that were announced last budget; for example, funding for the Longreach State High School for upgrade to the skills, development and training facilities. It was announced in the last budget; now you are going to announce it in this budget as well? The Longreach Hospital received \$500,000 out of \$4.8 million to spend on the rectification of structural issues, electrical and mechanical services. What I am looking for is the promise at the 2020 election by the Labor Party for renal dialysis in Longreach. We still do not have it.

**Mr Lister:** Where is it?

**Mr MILLAR:** We still do not have it. We have families who have to leave Longreach and spend time away in Townsville and Rockhampton, breaking up families, to get what is basic renal dialysis care in the town of Longreach. Longreach is a major area for outback Queensland. Surely, we can have renal dialysis in Longreach. We also have spending that was announced in the last budget for the Outback Rail Adventure, \$495,000 out of \$1.3 million. Thank you, but can we get the money out there and spend it?

What they want to do with the tourism market out there is give that real outback experience of having an old train coming in from Emerald to Longreach as part of the tourism adventure. In the last two weeks many of you would have seen, if you are following on Facebook, that Richard Kinnon is bringing the big paddle steamer *Pride of the Murray* from Victoria all the way up to the Thomson River. That will be a fantastic opportunity because we have a world-class, first-class tourism sector in outback Queensland, and I am looking forward to seeing that.

More money needs to be spent in the Central Highlands. It is a growing community that desperately needs more infrastructure and more spending. I cannot go past the \$6 billion in road maintenance upgrades we need for Queensland—\$6 billion—and I am still trying to find the funding that should be committed for the Tambo-Springsure Road. Where is that money? It has been promised over the last couple of years by the federal government. They are giving 80 per cent. The state government only needed to give 20 per cent. We need the funding for that road because it plays a critical role in getting our beef from the Channel Country in to the processors in Rockhampton. It is important that you invest in regional Queensland.

Talking about the royalties increase—it was promised 25 or 26 times that there would be no tax increase—we have a royalty increase to pay for health. Well, as I said to the Minister for Health, where is that money? The very place that provides royalties is Blackwater. It needs a new hospital. The hospital in Blackwater was built when Utah came to Blackwater in the late 1960s or early 1970s and it is not fit for purpose. The government has tried to say, 'We need to increase the royalties so we can pay for the health initiatives.' That is great, but the very place that gives you the royalties is Blackwater. I would like to see that hospital.

The other thing you have to realise about royalties is that, while you have increased royalties and the price is high, resources companies have high input costs. I was at Dawson mine only last week talking to the manager there, Clarence. One of the big issues they have is high fuel prices. New tyres for the dump trucks are going up 15 per cent in the new financial year. So while you may say the coal price is high, the input costs—the margins—are not there. The margins are very slim at the moment, so just be a little bit careful.

**Mr Power:** The margins are slim in coal?

**Mr MILLAR:** Have those members opposite been to a coalmine to ask a coalmine manager, 'How are your margins? How are your input costs?' Because their input costs, like our input costs, are all going up. It is hard to even get tyres. It is hard to get staff. The margins are not there that you would think. These mining companies are doing their best to provide the royalties, and they have no problem providing royalties to Queensland but—

**Mr Power:** How much have costs gone up?

**Mr MILLAR:** Fifteen per cent in tyres, fuel prices have gone up, steel has gone up significantly, being able to get parts—

**Mr Power** interjected.

**Mr MILLAR:** Their input costs have gone up. If the member for Logan would like to go out to a mine and talk to a mine manager, he might find something out.

I will move to agriculture as the agriculture minister is in the House. Obviously one of the biggest issues we have in regional Queensland at the moment is lumpy skin disease, Japanese encephalitis and the threat of foot and mouth. It is on our doorstep. It is already in Indonesia and there are obviously concerns with Papua New Guinea. It is a huge issue in regional Queensland. I have noticed over the last seven years that the Labor government has increased the Public Service by over 35,000 people.

**Mr Lister:** It's about 40,000 already and 8,000 to come.

**Mr MILLAR:** I take that interjection; 40,000 already. Looking at staff numbers for the department of agriculture, going into this financial year we are looking at 2,108. When the LNP left office in 2015, in the 2014-15 budget we had 2,168 staff. So you have had an increase of 40,000 staff over the last seven years, but we have had a decrease of 60 staff in the department of agriculture. Why can't we get some of those Public Service staff numbers back into agriculture when we have biosecurity issues on our doorstep that need addressing?

Once we get foot-and-mouth here in Queensland, the beef industry will be in crisis. Once it gets here, it is going to be incredibly hard to stop. I remember when we were dealing with bovine Johne's disease here in Queensland in 2013. Once it gets in, it is hard to stop. The department have moved to management of BJD. That is why there is a biosecurity sign out the front of every beef producer's place. That is more red tape for our beef industry.

I implore the minister for agriculture to look at staffing numbers and fight a bit harder at the cabinet table to get some of those public servants the government is employing back into the department of agriculture, such as agronomists, beef extension people, vets and scientists. We certainly need them up in the cape because we need to make sure we keep out foot-and-mouth disease and other diseases which are coming in.

**Mr Lister:** They couldn't manage the grasshopper plague, could they?

**Mr MILLAR:** I take that interjection from the member for Southern Downs. That plague we had in North-West Queensland over 12 months ago was devastating. It ripped through all of those pastures. All we needed was the go-ahead to be able to use a chemical and get it on the ground, but at the end of the day that came too late and the pastures were already taken out by those locusts. We definitely need to make sure we put more effort and input into the department of agriculture because it is desperately needed at the moment.

Finally, debt continues to grow in Queensland. It is growing relentlessly. It is now \$110 billion and will be \$129 billion by the end of the forwards. This is up from \$72 billion in 2015, an increase of 80 per cent. At the end of the day, you have got to pay back the piper. At the end of the day, the money that we have borrowed—just to keep the lights on and to pay for the pens, pencils and books and to pay for staff—has to be paid back, and interest rates are inevitably going up. We are in the worst cost-of-living crisis we have seen since the 1970s. Fuel prices are over \$2 a litre, electricity prices are about to go through the roof, and the ability to pay our way is getting harder and harder.

Who is going to pay off this debt? Who is going to fix this debt? How is the government going to fix this debt? Where is the plan to fix the debt? It will be my grandchildren who will be paying off this debt. It will not be those opposite paying off this debt. You have got to live within your means, and that includes government, and you have got to make sure you have a plan for debt.

**Ms Boyd** interjected.

**Mr MILLAR:** I have to take that interjection from the member opposite. Debt is going to come back and bite us. I can tell you that now. With interest rates going up, it is going to come back and bite us. The more interest payments we need to make means we have less money for doctors and nurses. The more interest payments we have to make means we have less money for our schools or to protect our valuable agricultural industry—an industry at the moment which is very concerned about diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease and lumpy skin disease. We need to protect our beef industry. Beef prices are good. They are high at the moment, but one thing that will put the beef industry on its knees will be the incursion of foot-and-mouth disease, lumpy skin disease or other diseases. I call on the minister for agriculture to put some more staff in there. We had more staff at the end of our term than the government does now, so please do that.