




Speech By
Hon. Mark Furner

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

Record of Proceedings, 22 February 2022

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL (NO. 2)

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 **Hon. ML FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities) (3.28 pm): I rise to support the Appropriation Bill (No. 2) and the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill (No. 2). The Palaszczuk government, like many around the country and around the world, has faced unprecedented economic conditions as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Our government has acted firmly and decisively to manage the economic impacts of the pandemic. Most importantly, it has acted in the direct interests of the people of Queensland.

Members will recall that our Premier stood firm, backed by our health advice, when those opposite called for the borders to be opened 64 times before we even had a vaccine available to protect the population. Instead, we held firm and focused on the health of Queenslanders first—because you cannot have a healthy economy unless you have healthy people. The Palaszczuk government made strategic investments to support our economy—from payroll tax relief and market diversification grants to support for digital trade missions to keep our export markets strong.

We directly supported the needs of the agriculture industry through our agriculture coordination group to make sure critical issues were presented directly to government and then responded to in a timely fashion. Freight issues, workforce issues, logistical issues—this pandemic has thrown everything at our agriculture sector and we have come through incredibly well. Critical to the success of this work was working out and putting in place effective border arrangements based on and updated with the best available health advice.

Of course, the abject failure of the Commonwealth government to fulfil its constitutional responsibility for quarantine arrangements will stand as a permanent indictment of the LNP and the federal coalition. How a federal government, in the face of the worst pandemic to hit the world in more than a century, could turn its back on such a fundamental responsibility is beyond me.

Quarantine capacity was, of course, a critical component that allowed Pacific workers to enter Queensland and fill vital roles on farms, in meat processing facilities and in other roles where there was an insufficient supply of local workers. The Palaszczuk government ensured that regional on-farm quarantine facilities were available for agriculture sector workers. My Department of Agriculture and Fisheries worked closely with Queensland Health to make sure those facilities were fit for purpose and met the conditions of the health advice.

We have done more, with the new facility at Wellcamp ready to play an important role in whatever future turns this pandemic might look like or deliver. While the federal government hastens slowly on its facility at Pinkenba, Queensland has the Wellcamp facility ready to meet the state's needs.

Across the economy we see Queensland leading the nation in employment growth. An unemployment rate of 4.4 per cent was probably hard to imagine before coronavirus hit our shores, and almost unthinkable when we were in the full grip of the pandemic's early stages. In just the last month

some 17,400 jobs were created in our state, well ahead of every other state in the nation. In fact, there are more than 120,000 more Queenslanders in employment than there were pre pandemic. More than 1,000 jobs have been created per week since 2015. This is a record of which any government would be proud. We listened to the health advice, we saved Queensland lives and we invested strategically in the economy.

That is not the only sign of strength in the Queensland economy. Housing starts are up 40 per cent compared to before the pandemic. Economic growth in Queensland was 6.1 per cent last year, far outstripping the performance of the national economy. Retail sales are up 17 per cent compared to before the pandemic. Exports in 2021 are up \$79 billion compared to the year before. It is worth mentioning more than once—hundreds of thousands more jobs since 2015.

Turning to my electorate, this bill again highlights the positive work the Palaszczuk government has accomplished for Ferny Grove. It comes as no surprise that the nature of government and the running of departments require a need for funding especially and much more so during a global pandemic. The committee report notes that the key expenditure of about 87.8 per cent arose from three departments: the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs; the Department of Justice and Attorney-General; and Queensland Fire and Emergency Services. The remaining amounts were incurred by the Queensland Police Service; the Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water; and the Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning. I would also like to pass on my thanks to the Public Service in my electorate and across Queensland which kept things going and kept up the service delivery standards that we have come to expect.

As many local members have no doubt experienced, their constituents, be they grandparents or other family members, raised concerns regarding their family experiences with Child Safety and the need for assistance. Part of the additional expenditure in child safety was primarily due to additional funding to address increased demand for out-of-home care services in the child protection system.

In terms of the costs of the Department of Justice and Attorney-General, this was 'primarily due to funding to meet the state's share of the Queensland floods class action settlement in 2020-21'. For many Queenslanders, those floods remain in our memories, and some of the constituents who were part of the Mud Army turned around and offered themselves as supporters for the Care Army.

My electorate office fielded a number of calls throughout the pandemic when it came to the need for hotel quarantine arrangements and keeping Queenslanders safe. Before the vaccine was widespread, or even available, we needed to utilise hotel quarantine. This did carry a cost, as the committee report noted. Additional departmental services expenses incurred by Queensland Fire and Emergency Services for 2020-21 were 'primarily due to funding for the COVID-19 response for quarantine accommodation costs and logistics and border control activities, and additional funding to fulfil the election commitment of recruiting additional firefighters and for aerial firefighting'. I have come across many passionate firefighters in my time, as many members of this place would have also. I would like to thank the union, the QUFU, for their ongoing engagement as part of this government's plan to boost firefighter numbers.

It goes without saying that I would also like to acknowledge the Queensland Police Service as well as the Queensland Police Union for their roles in the COVID-19 response, a visible presence in protecting Queenslanders, whether it be on the borders or in hotel accommodation. They were there, the women and men in their blue uniforms, bravely assisting the public and keeping us all safe during this insidious pandemic.

The committee report noted expenses for the Queensland Police Service in 2020-21 were principally related to funding to ensure the sustainability of compliance activities for COVID-19 public health measures. The local Ferny Grove police station did a sterling job in supporting the community during the pandemic, and the approach from Queensland police in assisting the community with taking the appropriate health measures were, and are, applied with courtesy and, where needed, with firmness.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the importance of Appropriation (Parliament) Bill (No. 2) considering that it was experienced by all of this House and as the Treasurer advised on introducing the bill, this expenditure 'related in part to the costs of running the 2020 state election during the pandemic'. The state election was one like no other any Queenslanders has experienced. Who can ever forget the success on this side of the House? Five new members starting from Bundaberg, Hervey Bay, Caloundra and Nicklin down to Pumicestone—five quality members brought into this House as a result of the 2020 election. The election was successfully held as a result of our measures and practices that were put in place to make sure voters were kept safe as well. All Queenslanders had the right and ability to have their say and the opportunity to cast their votes. This right should not be taken for granted,

dismissed or called into question as some now former members of the LNP have attempted to do. To entertain claims that an election can be rigged is bad news for democracy and should not be entertained.

This is the people's house, one where schoolchildren from my electorate, and electorates from across this state, come to learn about the democracy that their parents and guardians participate in and one day they will participate in. The very fact that a worldwide pandemic did not stop the right to vote and the right to have a say should be celebrated. We should not forget the 2020 election and we should fight back any conspiracy theories from those opposite or anyone else who—

Mr MANDER: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order under standing order 118, relevance. This has absolutely nothing to do with the bill. I would ask that you rule on that thank you.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Gerber): Member for Ferny Grove, I will ask that you come back to the long title of the bill. I have been granting some latitude, but I ask that you come back to the long title of the bill.

Mr FURNER: It has every relevance to do with the bill had the member for Everton read this bill. We should not forget the 2020 election and we should fight back any conspiracy theories promulgated by those opposite or any other party out there. The people of Ferny Grove and all Queenslanders have benefited from what these bills have achieved, something for which we should all be grateful. I commend the bill to the House.

I wish to place on the record our thanks to all Queenslanders for their support during the difficult times we face during this pandemic and the absolute support they are providing to the Palaszczuk government on a regular basis. We are here for longevity. We are here to make sure we provide, as we do in every budget delivered in this House, the appropriate support and foundations to make sure Queensland prospers well into the future.