



Speech By  
**Michael Berkman**

**MEMBER FOR MAIWAR**


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**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL**

**APPROPRIATION BILL**

**REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (12.33 pm): I rise to make a contribution on the 2022 budget which, like each of the past five budgets in my time in this place, is an incredible missed opportunity. Despite the government's rhetoric, this is a middle-of-the-road, unambitious demonstration of this government's widely misplaced priorities. They are slim pickings but I will start with some of the good bits.

The school spending in Maiwar is very welcome. Indooroopilly State School will get a \$4 million upgrade of its admin area, which includes some new classrooms and frees up the old admin space for classrooms as well. Ironside State School is getting half a million dollars to increase its outside school hours care capacity, which is also very welcome. Figtree Pocket State School is getting \$650,000 for a new outdoor learning area for B block and there is around \$1 million for minor works and maintenance for schools across the electorate. I am very much looking forward to finding out what that entails.

The School Breakfast Program is an example of a great Greens' policy that the government has picked up, in part at least, although it is orders of magnitude less than what the Greens proposed to spend in the policy that we took to the 2020 state election for free school breakfasts and lunches. Just over a year ago, the member for South Brisbane moved a private member's motion seeking support for this policy from the government. Back then it was met with scorn and ridicule yet now it is in the budget. It is worth reflecting on some of the comments of the education minister in *Hansard*. She said—

Basically, we are trying to solve a problem that does not exist ... The Greens have not given one skerrick of evidence to suggest that this affects children in schools today ...

She went on to say—

I do not know of one school community that has come to me in relation to the Greens' policy.

Obviously they have found some of those schools. It is interesting that \$1.8 million has been snuck into the budget for the next four years and nearly \$600,000 in ongoing funding. However, there is absolutely no detail on this in the SDS—not a single word—other than the line item for the budget measure itself. I am very keen to understand exactly what the government has in mind.

The increase in royalties is another example where they have really done the bare minimum for a defensible increase in royalties. They have made absolutely no change to increase the royalty rate for lower priced thresholds. The problem with that is that if and when coal prices return to something like normal—which they inevitably will; they have moved because of international forces beyond our control—Queenslanders will be no better off. When we get to the point where prices are under \$175, Queenslanders will continue to get ripped off while multinational coal companies and coal billionaires will continue to profit off the climate crisis.

The Queensland Resources Council is unhappy and Macfarlane has his knickers in a knot so clearly it is a move in the right direction. However, it does nothing to make sure that Queenslanders get their fair share of profits, which will increasingly be generated through the extraction of new economy minerals, as we heard just this morning from the minister. These really are just half-measures. It is nice to see them picking up on some of our long-standing proposals, but it is time they saw fit to give Queenslanders our fair share of coal and gas royalties in their final years and the mineral resource profits of the future.

I want to touch on a few specific portfolio areas, all of which tell a story of minor incremental progress but, overall, show that the government's priorities are fundamentally misplaced. It is good to see some big spending for the acquisition of protected areas. I acknowledge that \$250 million is a big number and a significant improvement on previous spending. However, when you line that up against previous analysis from the QTC it makes it clear that it is still not enough to get to the government's target of 17 per cent protected areas estate. The QTC tells us that the kind of capital spending we are looking at will only expand the protected areas estate to around 13 per cent and we need an additional \$80 million a year to properly maintain the parks estate.

Jason Lyddieth from the ACF has made the clear observation that there is nothing in this budget for the climate and I agree with his observation that it is outrageous. Just this morning the Deputy Premier told us that we have experienced the worst disaster season since 2011. It beggars belief, especially in light of the recent federal election outcome, that they would so flagrantly ignore the need for urgent action on the climate crisis to address the impact it is having on Queenslanders' lives.

Energy priorities in this budget tell a similar story. There is no new money for publicly owned renewable energy beyond what was allocated in the 2021 budget. We have not forgotten the big announcement of a \$2 billion renewable energy and hydrogen fund, which in last year's budget turned out to be mostly hot air. They still have not allocated the money that was announced in last year's budget. The announced \$2 billion was actually only \$1 billion over the forward estimates and half of that was already allocated, so the \$2 billion flashy announcement immediately became a quarter of that—half a billion dollars of money committed. There is nothing additional in this budget. It is still just a nebulous promise to spend money and this budget confirms that. It confirms the fact that one billion of those promised dollars are out past the forward estimates.

We still are not on track to hit 50 per cent renewables by 2030. There is still no plan to phase out coal. The energy minister has committed to release the government's energy plan later this year, so he still has a chance to do the work and plan a stable, steady transition. Time will tell whether he has the spine for this task or if he will just continue to squib it as we have seen so far. I cannot say that I am particularly hopeful given the spending priorities set out for the state owned energy corporations in the budget.

When we look at three GOCs in electricity generation—Stanwell, CS Energy and CleanCo—their combined spending on fossil fuel generation will be more than twice what they will spend on increasing renewable energy storage capacity. We desperately need that storage infrastructure. That has to be an integral part of our transition to renewable energies, but the government has only made it as far as a feasibility study into pumped hydro at the scale we need in Queensland. The energy minister again told us just this morning that energy storage is key to our renewable energy future, but we still are taking only baby steps here in Queensland because the government will not invest in it. CleanCo, that bastion of publicly owned renewable generation, is spending \$13.6 million on the Kogan North gas fields. That is a joke. It is a bad joke.

Contrary to the narrative that we have heard in the media that energy GOCs appear to be banking the dividends or using these to prop themselves up, they are not giving them back to the government or to households. They have effectively scrapped dividends for one year but not to give us cheaper power. They are spending this on other stuff, including coal, gas and some batteries. Using the windfalls from the energy crisis to keep open the very same infrastructure that drove that crisis over the past few weeks is madness.

Turning to transport, it is good to see some commitments on rail. It is still heaps less than road spending which continues to dominate this budget, and that is something that has to change. It is incredibly disappointing that we again see no accessibility upgrades at Taringa station. This year marks 30 years from the Disability Discrimination Act introducing accessibility requirements. This is when we are supposed to have met those requirements, but we still miss the mark. I say it is disappointing—and it is—but what that misses is the fact that it makes a very real difference to the daily lives of Taringa residents who have mobility issues and who simply cannot use their local train station.

Beyond this, the new budget figures show that, even with patronage on public transport recovering slightly, fares in South-East Queensland are at \$275 million for the entire year. That will only cover about 10 per cent of the cost of running the public transport system. The government still will not

tell us how much it will cost to run its new privatised ticketing system which is surely at this point getting close to a really significant proportion of all fare revenue. Why not simply make public transport free? Eliminate the burden and the hassle of dealing with fares, entice more people onto public transport, cut pollution, cut traffic, give people freedom to move around the city. Why?

**An honourable member:** Who's going to pay for it?

**Mr BERKMAN:** Someone's not listening. Jesus! Perhaps the most egregious and the most shocking demonstration—

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Mr BERKMAN:** If they would keep their mouths shut, maybe there would be something to learn from this process.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Lister): Order, members! The interjections are not being taken.

**Mr BERKMAN:** Perhaps the most egregious and shocking demonstration of this government's wrongheaded priorities can be seen in the extraordinary spending on prison expansion. This budget includes half a billion dollars of capital spending on prisons. In the coming year, there is \$513 million of capital spending on prisons. Next year they will spend \$454 million on one prison, the stage 2 expansion of the Southern Queensland Correctional Precinct. Let us compare that to the social housing capital spending in the coming year. Bear that figure in mind—\$454 million in one year on one prison. Let us add up the social housing capital spend. If we consider construction on new social housing, expanding existing social housing, land acquisition for new social housing and capital grants to community housing providers, that totals just under \$450 million. That figure deserves the stony silence it is getting from that side of the House. It is a shocking indictment on this government's priorities. It makes my blood boil. The government is spending more on one prison in a year than it is spending on the entire social housing construction budget.

**Ms Grace** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for McConnell is warned under the standing orders.

**Mr BERKMAN:** We are left wondering what the hell this government stands for. What does it stand for? These just are not progressive political priorities. This is not a progressive government or party. The figures in this budget tell the real story. Despite all the rhetoric, the government has abandoned genuine redistributive justice and progressive principles. The numbers in this budget paint a very plain picture of that. On social housing we have an implicit policy of never housing everyone on the social housing waiting list. We are spending more on prisons than we are on social housing.

In education we are still not meeting our SRS, schooling resource standards, obligations. State owned fossil fuel projects are outspending storage for renewables. Of course the Labor faithful want to think of themselves as progressive. Almost universally Labor folks I have met, whether they are rank and file members or members of parliament on the left or the right, want to see their governments actually be more progressive. Labor in Queensland is not progressive, just like their federal counterparts. They do not support welfare above the poverty line. They have abandoned the system of progressive taxation. They are more concerned about lying to coal communities and our energy communities than managing a smooth transition. They literally legislated against the right to protest—

**Mr LANGBROEK:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The point of order is that the member is using unparliamentary language. I ask that he withdraw it.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I will take some advice. Member for Surfers Paradise, yes, you do have a correct point of order. Member for Maiwar, you did use some unparliamentary language. I ask you please to withdraw and then continue with your contribution.

**Mr BERKMAN:** I withdraw. They have literally legislated against our right to protest in Queensland in the interests of their fossil fuel donors. It is a party that no longer even supports the right of workers to strike, while wages have stagnated for decades. How can we expect the conditions of workers to improve if they cannot even stand up for those rights? Neoliberalism is pretty much baked into their emphasis and their approach to economic management these days, especially this persistent focus on abstract economic measures rather than how hard real people's lives are.

What is the government doing to actually measure genuine progress or hardship in people's lives? Let us take a simple example. When our health system fails, resulting in someone's early or preventable death, that will only show up as a positive in our growth numbers in this and in every other budget. Whether we look at GDP or at gross state product, measures of economic growth do not show the loss, grief and hardship of the affected community and family. These numbers are bolstered by the health costs, the expense of health care and the funeral costs.

Look at the impacts of climate change. The clean-up costs from the floods we saw recently are all positive for economic growth and GDP. The insurance premiums are going up. That is a positive for GDP until of course properties become uninsurable and Queenslanders cannot afford to insure their

homes. There is no meaningful measure for the trauma experienced by the floods, fires and other natural disasters that continue to be fuelled by decisions such as those made by this government as it continues to prop up coal and gas. They persistently claim they are doing the important work and that the economy is in fine form, but no-one gives a damn about GDP, GSP or economic growth if they can no longer afford to rent in the community that they belong to, let alone buy a home and enjoy the security that that offers. No-one gives a damn about economic growth when social housing is not only—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Pause the clock. Member for Maiwar, I am afraid that you have just used some unparliamentary language. I ask that you please withdraw and then continue with your contribution.

**Mr BERKMAN:** I withdraw. Economic growth means nothing to people for whom social housing is completely unavailable or to the vast majority of people who might benefit from that. It means nothing to those who might now own their own home but live with the very real threat of the so-called one-in-100-year flood every 10 years and who know that this government is only making those events more and more likely with every passing year as it continues to expand the coal and gas sector. It is time for us to say the quiet bit out loud. It is time for progressives across the state and the country to point out that Labor is a centre-right party. They are not representing progressive values. We will keep calling them out until they do better.

*(Time expired)*