



Speech By
Patrick Weir

MEMBER FOR CONDAMINE

Record of Proceedings, 22 February 2022

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL (NO. 2)

APPROPRIATION BILL (NO. 2)

 **Mr WEIR** (Condamine—LNP) (3.38 pm): I rise to speak to the appropriation bills currently before the House. This is not unusual. Indeed, it is a process that we go through pretty much every year. The government will present an appropriation bill to cover unforeseen expenditure that may arise that was not foreseen or accounted for in the annual budget. This unforeseen expenditure needs to be approved by the parliament via an appropriation bill.

According to the explanatory notes to the bill, timely consideration of unforeseen expenditure enhances transparency and accountability of government expenditure. Isn't that a phrase that we have heard a lot about in recent times? Openness and transparency in regard to this government is all about the lack thereof. During the end-of-year break we saw the Palaszczuk government engulfed in a lack of integrity crisis—a crisis of a lack of integrity and transparency. It is somewhat ironic that the first bill we have before the House this calendar year has explanatory notes that state it will enhance transparency and accountability of government. In my brief contribution to this debate let's have a look at how that transparency and accountability stack up.

The Appropriation (Parliament) Bill (No. 2) 2021 has an unforeseen expenditure amount of \$1.795 million for the Legislative Assembly and Parliamentary Service. On introducing the bill, the Treasurer advised that this expenditure related, in part, to the costs of running the 2020 state election during the pandemic. There is no doubt that the pandemic has thrown many budgets into disarray and of course there is going to be a significant spend on this parliamentary precinct in the coming year.

The unforeseen expenditure for the Appropriation Bill (No. 2) is more significant, a total of \$447.456 million. The majority of the total unforeseen expenditure, 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. The Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs will receive \$114.247 million. This is a department that is in crisis under this government. The explanatory notes state that the additional departmental services expenses, \$92.247 million, were primarily due to the additional funding to address increased demand for out-of-home care services in the child protection system.

Almost daily we hear of the failures in this department under this minister. If this funding would solve those problems, it would be truly wonderful. However, the problems run a little deeper than that. There is a cultural problem that needs to be resolved first. We are talking about the most vulnerable members of our society, and those on the front line need all the support and resources that can be provided. My staff and I, like many members in this House, have experienced the frustration that comes

with trying to get a satisfactory resolution to the issues that come into our office. This is extremely traumatic for our staff and we have all experienced it. They take it home and it weighs on their conscience.

Additional expenditure of \$188.94 million incurred by the Department of Justice and Attorney-General in 2020-21 was identified by Treasury as being primarily due to funding to meet the state's share of the Queensland flood class action settlement in 2021. Most of the general public would like to see this department and minister get tough on the young recidivist offenders who are causing havoc across this state. Having a car stolen by one of these hoodlums seems to be a way of life. Nowhere is immune. From the city to the bush, crime is out of control in this state.

Additional expenditure incurred by the Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water, \$6.352 million, was chiefly due to the reallocation of funding from the Department of Resources for water functions when those departments were split. Going forward, this department will need a much larger injection to repair Paradise Dam. This is the dam that was built by the Beattie government, partially torn down by this government and now needs to be rebuilt with the support of the federal government. The department of state development will receive \$52.845 million.

The question that many residents in Condamine have for this department and this Palaszczuk government is: where is the funding amount for the Wellcamp quarantine facility? The government refuses to tell Queenslanders how much this project is costing the state. The Premier and the Wagner Group both say it is commercial-in-confidence. These are public funds and the taxpayer has a right to know. Let us not forget that this project did not go out to a tender process; there was only one bidder. After months of secrecy, last week we had the bizarre situation where the Premier then disclosed that the state had contributed \$50 million. The same afternoon the health minister was talking about a figure of \$190 million. We do not know what the lease amount is or what the terms of that agreement are.

There is only one reason the government will not disclose the details of this arrangement and that is because there is something they do not want the public to know. There is something in this deal that they know will not pass the pub test. The Treasurer stood in this House this morning and proudly announced public funding for a range of projects, but on the Wellcamp project mystery still surrounds. As I said at the beginning of my contribution, the explanatory notes state that the government needs to display transparency and accountability of government expenditure. That includes Wellcamp.

There is additional funding for the Police Service and Fire and Emergency Services, which we know have had an enormous workload throughout the pandemic. We will not be opposing this bill, but this government still has a lot of questions to answer.