



Speech By  
**Samuel O'Connor**

**MEMBER FOR BONNEY**


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**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL**

**APPROPRIATION BILL**

**REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (12.21 am): Representing the community I call home is a great honour and I am forever grateful for being given the opportunity to serve in this place. Few more important things can happen in this parliament than the budget because it is our chance for the state government to change the lives of so many Queenslanders through the actions they take. Disappointingly, the opposite has happened for my part of the Gold Coast.

At the high level, the cost-of-living relief will barely be noticed by most people with the price of so many things going up and up. Housing affordability and accessibility is one of the biggest issues for the people I represent. Around 46 per cent of homes in Bonney are rentals and it has never been tougher for many of those tenants. The most recent data from 2021 showed that even around a year ago 2,620 people from my area were on the social housing waitlist. That is a more than 70 per cent increase on the number of people waiting in 2018 and around half of those people, 1,351, were classified as very high need. Over that time, the number of bedrooms available did not just stay stagnant; it actually went backwards, and this budget did not include a single new cent to build social housing. That impacts everyone looking for somewhere to live because if our most vulnerable Queenslanders are not able to find a place, it will flow on to the rest of the available properties, which creates even more pressure.

In terms of other projects in my electorate, all our area received was the next phase of funding for ongoing projects. There was nothing new. The biggest two projects, the second M1 and the new hospital at Coomera, will not be delivered for at least half a decade. We cannot wait that long. Our livability is massively under threat due to the simple fact that it takes longer and longer to get anywhere and due to the huge pressures being placed on the Gold Coast University Hospital, which already has the busiest emergency department in the nation. It should not take nearly an hour to drive through our suburbs, to drive from Parkwood to Coomera, to go from Labrador to Pacific Pines and from Arundel to Ormeau. The only way to fix that is by building another road option to the M1 for Gold Coasters to use.

I heard the main roads minister in his contribution say he is fast-tracking the Coomera Connector. He has been the main roads minister since 2015 and the budget has confirmed we will not be driving on the completed stage 1 until after 2026, a ridiculous time frame. We found out 80 per cent of the second M1 funding will not even be coming until after July next year. We needed this road years ago and our city deserves better.

It is also a real issue for people who live right next to where the Coomera Connector will go. In my area that is everyone in The Surrounds and Arundel Springs. They are living in limbo because we have not seen any plans released, only glossy artist impressions. We need to see what this road is going to look like and get a guarantee that it will include the best possible sound barriers and environmental offsets. There is no excuse because the detailed business case was finished long ago.

Even when another level of government puts up a portion of the funds for a project, the state government has not stepped up to put their own on the table. The Pine Ridge Road-Captain Cook Drive-Gold Coast Highway intersection has over \$5 million in funding from the City of Gold Coast committed, but the budget shows this vital upgrade has completely disappeared from QTRIP. Not a cent has been put up by the state after it was listed last year. This intersection is nothing short of a nightmare. It has not been touched in decades and the slip lanes and turning lanes are nowhere near the standard they should be at. I urge the transport minister to at least release the plans and costings of this upgrade so we know what we need to advocate for.

The only school in my area receiving any funding was Coombabah State High School. This project is an important one and one I have long advocated for to make sure our students there can ditch their old demountables and have proper learning environments, but it is nothing new. This is just the next part of the project funding. In terms of the other high school in my area, Southport State High School, I will keep advocating for funding for a bigger indoor sports area which can house the whole school for assemblies.

I wrote to the education minister a few weeks ago with my wish list of projects that I wanted to see funded—all the things I have heard from our local P&Cs and principals and all on their respective school infrastructure plans. Disappointingly, every single request was ignored. We received no funding for the Arundel State School master plan to deliver new classrooms, nothing to get the toilets fixed at Labrador State School and no investment from the state government to build a new early years precinct at Musgrave Hill State School.

Moving to the other areas I cover in terms of the environment portfolio, climate change is the greatest challenge our environment is facing and nowhere in Queensland is more at risk than the Great Barrier Reef. The other issue we are facing is a loss of biodiversity. Action on climate change will mean nothing if we do not practically protect the precious ecosystems of Queensland. Since I became shadow environment minister I have been calling out the government's inaction on conservation. In the last two budgets protected areas have increased by just 0.01 per cent each year. At this pace environmental stakeholders estimated it would take the state government a thousand years to reach the 17 per cent target they announced in 2015. Clearly, they have shamed the government into action. You cannot just set targets because they sound good and not have a plan to deliver them. That does nothing for our environment.

The percentage of Queensland that is protected is the lowest of any state in the nation and the Service Delivery Statement shows it has actually gone backwards in the last year to just 8.21 per cent. I will be generous to the minister about that. It is a bit of a technicality due to the classification of two reserves, but this would not be an issue if the government had actually achieved a meaningful increase in their more than seven years in power. The fact that the status of just two reserves can send the government's performance back to the level they reached four years ago is telling too.

Conserving our environment is a fundamental value of the Liberal National Party. We believe in a sustainable environment, balancing the need to be productive while preserving our natural assets to be enjoyed by future generations. We have consistently called for the government to deliver on this and to focus on management hand in hand with expansion.

Conservation and tourism groups deserve praise for their huge effort over many years to achieve the result we have seen in this budget. They went so far as creating an alliance earlier this year, the launch of which I was honoured to attend, to try to push the government to act. I want to pay tribute to the hard work of those organisations: the Queensland Conservation Council, the Wilderness Society, the National Parks Association of Queensland, Pew Charitable Trusts, WWF, Ecotourism Australia, the Queensland Industry Tourism Council and the Queensland First Nations Tourism Council. This is a great win for them all and I will be following the government's progress closely to make sure this funding is actually delivered.

Where did this sudden action come from? At the beginning of this month at a press conference the Premier had a light-bulb moment. She was in a national park and the thought suddenly occurred to her that maybe the government she leads might actually need to do something to achieve a target that it set for itself. The Premier said—

... of course we're in the beautiful Daintree, and you know it made me really think that as the leader of this state and I know my colleagues would also agree that now's the time that we should think about expanding our national parks estate, we've had some small programs in the past to look at purchasing land adjacent to some of our world heritage areas that have high conservation value but it's something that we're going to give some serious consideration to.

These comments came seven years after the Palaszczuk government first set their target for protected area expansion. It should not have taken so long. The LNP welcomes the \$262.5 million for land acquisitions and capital works, but we want details on when it is allocated so we can be sure it will

actually be spent over the next four years, and we want to see more resources put into management. It is not good enough to declare an area as protected and say 'job done'. We need to back that up with better management so these conservation estates are world-class and so their biodiversity is protected from feral animals, weeds and bushfires.

The government has form in announcing environmental policies and failing to deliver. Since 2017 we have heard about the government's flagship \$500 million Land Restoration Fund. Yesterday the Premier said it had been delivered. I think we have very different definitions of the word 'delivered'. Not only was the fund barely mentioned in the budget papers; the minister confirmed in answer to a question on notice earlier this month that only \$3.19 million of the \$500 million has actually been spent and that it would be at just \$10 million by the end of the next financial year. Of course, many of these projects are long term, but not even one-fifth of the fund has been allocated to specific projects. Again, it is announcement versus delivery. They cannot come out and say they are delivering \$500 million in an effort against climate change when so little has actually been delivered.

In Budget Paper 2 last year we saw the Carbon Reduction Investment Fund. In a footnote it said that the returns generated would be used to meet the costs of the Land Restoration Fund. There is no mention of this fund in this year's budget papers—no mention of any returns generated.

Funding to protect our koala population became even more urgent this year when their classification was escalated to endangered; however, the Queensland government's funding is just a fraction of the \$193 million that New South Wales has put on the table—barely a fifth. I encourage the government to increase the funding in the forwards. If we are going to reverse the trend of declining koala population it will take serious investment and action, and it is shameful that New South Wales is beating us by so much. With the Olympics coming in 2032, we cannot risk having one of our most iconic native animals becoming extinct in the wild just as our state is being put on the world stage.

In December the minister allayed concerns of local governments and residents by providing clarity on waste levy payments. We do not have a clear path for the future of waste and recycling in this state. This budget gives no clarity. Our waste industries need that certainty. They are willing to build the infrastructure that we need, but they need this government to show direction. I implore the minister to outline that, work with industry and provide a clear road map for how we will reduce what goes into landfill and increase our resource recovery rates.

Last year through estimates it was made clear that the state government is spending half of what the federal government does on the Great Barrier Reef. That money only increased from the federal government this year—so much so that they are now outspending the state three to one. The budget has provided very little new funding for the health of our reef. What is more concerning is that the tiny amount of funding for Smartcane BMP is likely coming to an end. The SDS effectiveness measure has been discontinued for BMP programs. The funding for these programs is due to expire at the end of this year, so I worry it will not be renewed.

BMP programs have been confirmed by the minister to meet or exceed the government's own regulations. Why would the government want to stop backing them and the farmers who are undertaking them? They need increased support, not a cut. The farmers I have visited taking part in these programs use every innovation available to them to reduce their run-off and any other broader environmental impacts. They want the nutrients they use to stay on their properties and they do not want to hurt what is around them.

**Mr Power** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Martin): Member for Logan.

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Pause the clock. Members, I will wait for silence. It is getting very hard to hear the member for Bonney's contribution. I would ask all members to keep the level of discussion between each other to a very quiet level and please limit your interjections.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** In estimates last year the minister made it clear there had been no plans or seemingly any consideration to make the environment department carbon neutral or to reduce the emissions of their operations. Of all the parts of government, the environment department need to lead by example. They need to show that they can take measures themselves to reduce their own emissions. I was at K'gari just recently and I saw the ranger station at Eurong running on dirty diesel generators. This is the largest ranger station for one of our most important national parks, and it would make sense to run this through solar and batteries.

Finally on the environment, I again call on the minister to provide some clarity on the next round of single-use plastic bans. Queenslanders have strongly supported the ban and have been trying to reduce these unnecessary plastics, but businesses and community groups need time to plan for the

next phase. Without that planning time we will end up with large amounts of unused stock going to landfill, completely defeating the purpose of the ban. There is no need for this to be a secret. Just come out and tell people what is happening so they can get on board.

I will finish off on innovation, but there is not much to report. Gone are the days of Kate Jones and Peter Beattie. Advance Queensland has reached the end of its funding, yet this government has so little aspiration that it has not worked out the next phase. We have a mention of developing a road map, so there clearly are plans for a plan, but no further detail could be found anywhere in the budget. I asked for clarification from the minister's office and they told me that apparently it will be announced in a week or two. Why is it being delayed? Could it be because over the weekend former premier Peter Beattie urged the Palaszczuk government to adopt a new innovation agenda? Is the announcement delayed to get some clear air from these comments, so it does not look like they are following his lead? It is even more concerning because the budget is the chance to genuinely fund this. If it is not there, they are not serious about innovation. Again, with the Olympics on the horizon, now is the time to build our innovation ecosystem. This budget was the chance to do that and there was nothing to be seen.