



Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BONNEY

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation Bill

Economics and Governance Committee, Report

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (12.17 pm): Two months after the budget it is good to have an opportunity to talk about innovation funding in our state. I did not really get the chance to do that during budget week because at the time the funding—the next phase of Advance Queensland—was not actually announced as part of the budget; it was completely missing. In a strange coincidence to that lack of announcement, a couple of weeks before that former premier Peter Beattie urged the state government to embrace a new innovation agenda, saying, 'You've got to have a vision and you've got to demonstrate it.' With the new funding package finally put forward by the state government hidden in the budget under decisions taken but not yet announced before being made public a month after the budget, we have not seen much of an agenda, let alone anything that you could call visionary.

Advance Queensland's funding itself is actually quite difficult to follow. When we look at the first phase, there is little detail in the budget about how this funding has been allocated and at estimates even the director-general could not simply outline how the funding package has been defined and what has been spent. It took a number of follow-up questions. We are constantly told that Advance Queensland is a \$755 million package, but it took estimates to find out that only about half of that—\$331.5 million—comes from the innovation department.

That alone is not a huge issue. It should not matter who spends the money as long as the outcome is leading towards a more innovative Queensland. We found out that the rest of the funding identified as being Advance Queensland comes from across practically every department of government. What is interesting about that is that the government can just call whatever they want 'innovation' and add any project or funding into Advance Queensland that they like. We could not get any further details on how that is put together other than that they have a discussion about it internally. They can make their innovation agenda as big as they want it by just having a chat amongst departments, so what surprises me the most is that they have only decided to claim \$755 million as innovative.

At estimates we could not even get a breakdown from the director-general of how many hundreds of millions of dollars in funding has been spent by the innovation department in terms of Advance Queensland. I have a question on notice to try to get more details on that. Innovation should be flowing through every facet of government, but without a clear way of identifying and assessing spending there is a risk that the achievements of this program are being overinflated. It is all about spin over substance. Adding to that, the funding for the next phase of Advance Queensland represents a cut to innovation.

Comparing like for like, the innovation department's funding for the last seven years has averaged nearly \$50 million a year, but the new announcement covering the next three years equates to closer to \$30 million a year. In the run-up to 2032 that is the last thing we need to see. Now is the time to invest in innovation, not to spend less on it. We have also not seen the public release of the \$375,000 review into Advance Queensland. The minister said at estimates, 'I am more than happy to review those documents to make sure that they are appropriate to be made public', later committing to the general principle of releasing the review. It has been weeks and we have not seen anything, not even a redacted copy. He is the next speaker so maybe he will table it.

I will conclude with the other interesting revelation we heard at estimates, linking two things together that I never thought would be in the same sentence: koalas and a roller-coaster. We received confirmation that the state government approved the reallocation of \$2.7 million given to Dreamworld to build a world-class koala research facility to instead go towards building the *Steel Taipan* roller-coaster. What is extraordinary about this is that we have no evidence of any efforts by the state government to see if Dreamworld will ever actually build the facility which is on hold.

The Premier herself said Dreamworld should 'do the right thing', completely forgetting the fact that her own government approved this reallocation. They cannot blame this on COVID either. The state government's own press release from early 2019 said construction was expected to begin in mid-2019, at least six months before anyone even knew what COVID was. This would have been Queensland's first native animal genomics lab, having the potential to be not only a tourism attraction but also help our conservation efforts by supporting work to manage the threats our unique fauna face. What this shows is a government that only cares about announcements over outcomes. We need to see so much more in the innovation space if we are to realise the potential of the Olympics in 2032. We should be investing more than ever in supporting these future industries to make the most of when we will have the eyes of the world on our state and the South-East Queensland region.