



Speech By  
**Samuel O'Connor**

**MEMBER FOR BONNEY**

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Record of Proceedings, 16 August 2022


**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL**

**APPROPRIATION BILL**

**Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)**

**Appropriation Bill**

**Health and Environment Committee, Report**

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (5.00 pm): We have just heard ageist comments from the member for Lytton when very soon the youngest member of parliament will be giving his first speech. It is completely ridiculous.

**Mr Mander:** Who is the second youngest?

**Mr O'CONNOR:** It is not me, actually.

**Ms PEASE:** Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I take offence at the reference to ageist comments. It was not an ageist comment. I ask him to withdraw it.

**Mr SPEAKER:** The member has taken offence. Will you withdraw?

**Mr O'CONNOR:** As a good little boy, I withdraw.

**Mr SPEAKER:** I will ask you to do it unconditionally.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** I withdraw unreservedly. Estimates again saw a disappointingly short time frame for questions about our environment, leaving many topics unable to be properly canvassed so I will put some of those on record today.

Firstly, we were not able to ask why the state government is failing on its diversion rate targets for municipal solid waste. MSW diversion from landfill is moving in the opposite direction to the targets they have set of themselves. Despite efforts in our pre hearing questions on notice, we failed to get any breakdown of resource recovery funding. I was not able to ask for more specifics about the single-use plastics ban and why the five-year road map has everything as a possibility and no real information or new plans from what we already knew. We would have liked to ask more about the Land Restoration Fund particularly because it relies heavily on the federal government's Emissions Reduction Fund. All LRF projects must register with the ERF and they must follow an ERF method so I want to ask if there was a chance that LRF projects will be caught up in the issues that that ERF has faced, especially with a review now underway. Of course, we found out that just \$4.77 million of the \$500 million LRF has actually been spent despite the Premier describing this fund as being delivered.

We also were not able to ask questions on bushfire mitigation efforts, on heritage protection and on the efforts of the department to monitor our conservation areas. What we did find out is the slow pace of environmental action versus environmental announcements from this government. The biggest

environmental announcement of the budget, \$250 million allocated for expanding Queensland's conservation estate, half of which will not be spent until the last year of the program, which will be about 2025, 2026. That means it will have taken the state government a decade and three state elections to deliver tangible progress on a conservation target that they set of themselves. Their progress is currently barely noticeable, with the percentage of Queensland's land area protected being the same as it was five years ago—8.21 per cent—the lowest of any jurisdiction in Australia.

We also learnt that private protected areas are massively underfunded, with just \$1.6 million in management in the latest round of funding, which is no incentive for a landholder to take part in this program. It is no wonder that only 16 applied to join it in the last year, which is 12 from across the state proactively approaching the department to take part.

In terms of the millions of dollars in koala research lab funding that was approved by the state government to be redirected into building a roller-coaster, at the time the now minister gave a glowing endorsement of the project, but now it seems there is very little desire to see whether what could have been Queensland's first animal genomics lab will be delivered with money that has already been given to Dreamworld. Disappointingly as well at the hearing we were not able to find out how many koalas had actually ridden the roller-coaster. Again it goes to announcements versus outcomes for this government. Koalas have been classified as endangered and I would have thought the government might want to look into projects like this.

The minister disappointingly did not provide support for the Great Barrier Reef Foundation's federal funding which federal Labor have committed to cut, instead raising media concerns with this organisation despite the environment department being involved with them on many, many projects. The government also confirmed that it provides on average around \$1.4 million to the Smart Cane Best Management Practice program to help improve the farming practices of growers in reef catchments. No confirmation was given though about whether this support would continue beyond the scheduled end date of March 2023 and there certainly was no commitment from this government to increase the support provided to canegrowers. This is a successful industry-led best practice program that meets and beats the reef regulations. The LNP firmly believes funding should be increased substantially to help more canefarmers join this program and be supported to reduce their environmental impact and therefore their operating costs whilst increasing their yields.

Finally, as it is something that I called for in my budget reply speech, the LNP welcomes the environment department's commitment to make their operations net zero by 2030 at the latest. We questioned the director-general about this in previous hearings and as at last year's estimates it had not been considered. This is the arm of government responsible for tracking Queensland's progress on emissions reduction and our action on climate change. They must lead by example. We would welcome any work DES is undertaking to help the broader operations of the Queensland government become net zero.