



Speech By  
**Sandy Bolton**

**MEMBER FOR NOOSA**


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Record of Proceedings, 23 June 2022

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL**

**APPROPRIATION BILL**

**REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (8.19 pm): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to respond to the 2022 appropriation bills. Firstly, I would like to commend all on the efforts of this past year, including our frontliners and volunteers who continue to do an incredible job in all ways. Thank you.

For Noosa, there are no surprises in this budget, as the majority of requests are either in the business case stage, such as the remaining parts of the Tewantin bypass, or the design review for bookend No. 2 on Kin Kin Road. Work has commenced on stage 1 of the bypass and work is about to start on the replacement of Six Mile Bridge No. 7, as well as bookend No. 1 of Kin Kin Range.

I thank Minister Bailey and TMR for attempting to address the devastating impacts to our hinterland communities from the inappropriate and dangerous volume of heavy haulage on a route assessed as deficient and inherently unsuitable a decade ago. As we await the outcome from the court case on behalf of those impacted, it is important that the survey, design and investigation works for the additional two projects for 2023-24 be brought forward as, with the danger to users as well as the damage to vehicles, this cannot wait.

We continued the COVID journey and experienced devastating disasters, including extensive flooding and the ongoing damage from that. We had a housing crisis unseen before and, as part of the COVID fallout, demand on our systems including health care that has led to even longer waitlists and shortages.

Through all of this, Queensland and Noosa surged in many realms. Whether it was people and businesses relocating from other states or the influx of visitors desperate for sunshine and to shake off the residuals from the past two years once borders opened, the result has brought relief as well as hardship. This from the ongoing housing crisis where within my community the record numbers of southerners relocating to Noosa has seen us being double the house-price-to-income ratio of the state and residential vacancies below one per cent for most of the year.

That there has been no substantial increase in the budget to tackle what is a humanitarian crisis—and it really is—I still cannot comprehend. When Queenslanders do not have a constant, safe, affordable and reliable roof over their head, the increase in demand for other services, including mental health support and domestic violence, climbs. Again, this last year in the Noosa electorate DV increased by another 30 per cent, leading to an exhaustion of police resources and volunteer organisations to plug the gaps.

I can only hope that the community housing partnerships spoken about by the Treasurer as part of the housing fund are ramped up and that the current underutilised government housing is fast-tracked in a strategy to address it through upzoning or otherwise. It is frustrating for all to see the inability of government to provide appropriate, local accommodation to sole occupants currently in family sized homes. We need to free these houses up desperately.

With no local or state government land in my electorate available for accommodations, temporary or otherwise, as was availed in decades past, it is imperative that land acquisition be part of any forward strategy to ensure in times of crisis there is something to fall back on. Even with the amount in capital expenditure allocated for housing next year, may I point out again, as I did last budget, that comparable countries to Australia host over 20 per cent of community housing versus Australia at less than five per cent. It will take many years at current rates to address demands.

I made pleas unsuccessfully to the then minister for resources some four years ago to utilise the former House with No Steps site for transitional and emergency accommodations as it has existing services, buildings and cleared camp sites for transportables. That I have had to see this sit empty for the last three years while it is master planned leaves me filled with anger, as it could and should have been utilised, including for those fleeing DV.

In addition, we are seeing essential facilities and services such as aged care beyond breaking point through an inability to access any staff and no support from governments of any level to make up the critical staffing shortfall which could be ameliorated if extensions on vaccination boosters were granted until such time as replacements are sourced. This is about the welfare of our most vulnerable, as what will happen to them should facilities have to close? Given our shortage of hospital beds, that is not an option. I would like to hear some clarity on this. Governments need to take responsibility and resolve this urgently instead of deferring to the reason it has occurred.

There have been a number of announcements that are very welcomed across Queensland. Substantial extra funds in a number of sectors has been wonderful news, including for hospitals and mental health which will see a mental health co-responder via the Queensland Ambulance Service based on the Sunshine Coast.

The question I have in relation to the mental health levy on businesses is why is there not a system of levies based on tiers of profit, including from our banks, to address our greatest social issues as part of their ESG policies rather than the wages bill of Queensland businesses? We have such wealth in this country and we should not be scrambling constantly to provide the basics. With ongoing extensive demands in so many realms and long waitlists for operations needed by Queenslanders so they can get mobile or back to work, I have yet to find where this has been addressed and can only hope to in the coming days.

With ambulance delays ongoing in our community, the new initiatives such as the clinical hub is welcomed and delivers similar to advocacies we had undertaken regarding the previous STAR pilot. With four out of five Australians over 65 having at least one chronic illness, Noosa has an older population where the average age is increasing at a faster rate than the rest of the state, with a 70 per cent increase on 2016 levels.

Coupled with private insurance being at its lowest level in the last 20 years, it is imperative that our Noosa Hospital, even though not a public one, have the appropriate contracted services from Queensland Health and capacity to deal with this. I look forward to positive news of current negotiations regarding an expansion of the emergency department at no cost to government which will alleviate our residents being redirected to SCUH and then unable to get back home, as well as the ramping there.

Of particular concern, and something I will continue to raise, is the need for an appropriate funding model for our palliative care hospices. With government contracts only providing 20 per cent of the needed income to provide these essential facilities, that organisations have to raise the balance makes no sense. These hospices are economical, they free up hospital beds and they are in high demand as part of our end-of-life choice. Why we have to keep fighting for this makes no sense!

Small business has had a win with cuts to payroll tax. However, tourism, which is a key industry for Noosa, has less funding than previously. Though it has been good to hear allocations for the tourism recovery strategy for the next 10 years, I continue to call out the inequity of programs such as Work in Paradise, Back to Work and the Growing Workforce Participation Fund that preclude Noosa based on its proximity to Brisbane. The reality is that Noosa has medium income levels below the state average with higher rents. We have restaurants and other businesses only able to open on limited days and aged-care facilities under unacceptable duress—all because we cannot access staff nor initiatives to obtain them.

One budget announcement that I was really thrilled to see realised after advocating for it since 2019 is the extra funding for the School Transport Assistance Scheme to ensure that children and families in shared care arrangements are finally no longer disadvantaged. This makes a real difference to so many lives and needs to incorporate the issue of 'locale' which has also caused enormous stress—and which I am sure will be included.

Concerningly, I cannot find a continuation of our funds for community transport. This was vital in plugging the gap for those under 65 travelling daily for cancer treatment to SCUH, and that it has not been included is unacceptable. As well, we seem to be missing some funding for Noosa organisations to deliver specialist homelessness services, the prep and delivery of meals, support to individuals for financial literacy, intoxication programs and emergency relief. We need these more than ever at the grassroots.

The minister touched on a number of arenas that I have yet to investigate including the increases in policing. I can only continue to advocate that, out of the 2,025 extra police to be engaged by 2025, a portion are allocated to address Noosa hotspots permanently versus our 'specials'.

It is always good to hear of funding to increase protected lands. However, increases for maintaining and monitoring national parks appears to be minimal. With concerns regarding the Cooloola Great Walk project, it is vital that government provide now more than ever targeted and appropriate resource allocation to accommodate any alternative activities to ameliorate impacts and ensure that our national parks are enhanced and do not become a breeding ground for degradation.

As we await the outcome of the Cooloola sustainability survey and years of advocacy to reduce the volumes entering our national parks at peak times, we must remember that extra protected land is always appreciated; however, the maintenance and management of existing land is equally important. It is really good to see the ongoing commitment to the rail duplication to Nambour; however, it is disappointing that our ongoing requests for a train shuttle from Gympie to Nambour to service commuting residents and tourists have not been addressed.

Even though our own TAFE was closed eight years ago and an expression of interest process is awaiting the announcement of a successful proponent, there has never been a more important time to invest in alternate education delivery methods. I look forward to the ongoing assistance of the department in this for Noosa.

Again I would like to point out the difficulties in Queenslanders being able to read the reports provided. At a glance, budgets in a number of realms—including grants within the Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport—are less than allocated in 2021-22, and I hope that through estimates questioning needed upgrades to sports facilities will be covered in upcoming grants rounds.

Additionally, I hope that funding committed during the recent federal election campaign by the LNP will be revisited by our new government, as these are desperately needed. I would like to reiterate again that volunteer organisations are invaluable in all realms. Grants over the last 12 months have been appreciated; however, the process of them sitting on edge yearly while continuing to provide essential services to our communities is draining on them. I look forward to a time when the time span is extended.

With the Treasurer advising of a \$1.9 billion net operating surplus, which appears to have resulted from increases to coal and oil royalties after a 10-year freeze, there are also questions with regard to what is being done about our level of debt. As always, the devil is in the detail, which will take time to dig through. The estimates process is an important element in this regard, and I reiterate again the need to review this process. The inadequate time allocation makes it unfeasible for many crossbenchers to attend in person, and the refusal to accept questions on notice makes no sense, given this is utilised elsewhere and in our federal parliament.

In closing, I congratulate the Treasurer and all who worked on this budget. There are many wonderful announcements. All I ask is that, while the big ticket items make great headlines, it is looking after what we have and ensuring the basics are accessible—such as affordable housing—that are essential as part of a sustainable, progressive Queensland. Let's communicate, innovate and collaborate and really engage in ways that meet our communities' expectations. Ultimately, that is what we are here in this chamber to do—to deliver to our communities, not to the policies and frameworks that may not be serving them as well as they should be anymore. I commend the bill to the House.