



Speech By
Stephen Andrew


MEMBER FOR MIRANI

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr ANDREW** (Mirani—PHON) (12.07 pm): It is with pleasure that I rise to speak on the Appropriation Bill 2022. At the outset I would like to acknowledge the Minister for Multicultural Affairs and her contribution on the Australian South Sea islanders. I have with me today Mr Clacy Fatnowna sitting in the gallery. He is my cousin and dear friend. I will tell honourable members right now that this budget and Queensland would not look the same if it were not for the contributions of the South Sea islanders in the cane fields, their blood sweat and tears and what they have done. They are great people. The amount of \$1.1 million is only the start of what these people deserve. I am hoping to see that this government actually supports them way more into the future.

Mr Katter interjected.

Mr ANDREW: That is correct. I take the interjection from the member for Traeger. Many of the things that I have wanted to see happen in Central Queensland for some time have been delivered in this budget. Notably, the biggest win for my electorate is a \$40.4 million allocation for the water pipeline to be built between Gracemere and Mount Morgan. I thank the member for Gladstone and Minister for Water for delivering this. This has been an ongoing issue and a long wait for the people of Mount Morgan. I thank the Rockhampton Regional Council for their contribution in taking the water to Mount Morgan to ensure that the people have water to drink, shower and also keep their plants alive. Mount Morgan's households and businesses have been without a reliable water supply since the beginning of last year, but it goes back much further than that; 22 years ago the dam was down at nine per cent.

It has been a long time coming. We need to make sure we utilise as many Mount Morgan locals as possible to put that infrastructure in place. I believe that corridor will be used as a slurry line for the soon-to-be-reopened mine, and the iron pyrite, and the acid that comes from the iron pyrite, will be used in Mount Isa to assist with mining.

Finding a permanent and secure water supply for Mount Morgan is crucial for the wellbeing of the town, the community and the businesses. This will deliver that to them, and they are so grateful. They are great people. We all know the contribution that Mount Morgan made to Australia by building the railway and paying off Australia's and the state's debt. I thank the minister and I look forward to working with the department and the Rockhampton Regional Council to ensure we get this infrastructure underway as soon as possible so that they do not have to keep taking the water up there at a cost to them.

I cannot help but feel that the budget missed a great opportunity to move forward with restoring the town's historic goldmine and the nearby Fireclay Caverns. We need to go further and ensure tourism in Mount Morgan reopens. I will be talking with the minister very soon. I spoke with the minister for

mines about opening areas for fossicking, which would be a great thing. Mount Morgan has a lot of gold still. There's gold in them there hills! Mount Morgan is full of it. We need to make sure that the Rockhampton Regional Council and the Queensland state government allow these areas to be used for fossicking as soon as possible, because people want to come from down south and all over Australia—probably all over the world—to look for gold. This area is renowned for it.

With the right investment and support, these areas could easily be developed into major tourist attractions for the entire region. Queensland owes a debt of gratitude for the huge economic contributions the Mount Morgan community has made to the state for well over a hundred years. I will continue to lobby the government to help the community get back on its feet after years of hardship. The new water pipeline is a wonderful first step towards providing Mirani with the water security that it needs. The Fitzroy agricultural corridor needs water as well. While there is great soil on the flat country near the Barrage and the Fitzroy River, unfortunately there is not enough water to make it a viable source of income for the agricultural corridor itself. The situation is becoming unsustainable; it is unfair on the farmers and residents who live there. I urge the government to step up and help these communities.

There are 63,290 square kilometres of roads in the Mirani electorate. This makes road safety a major issue for the entire community. This budget offers a generous scope of much needed roadworks, including \$10.2 million for the widening of the Gavial-Gracemere Road to four lanes and upgrading intersections. The budget is shared between Rockhampton and Mirani, and Mackay and Mirani. There has been \$15 million allocated from a \$497.4 million spend for a stage 1 road between Bald Hill Road and the Mackay Ring Road. I was pleased to see that construction has started on the Walkerston Bypass after many years. The bypass will become a designated heavy vehicle route between the Bruce Highway and the Peak Downs Highway to provide safety to the many thousands of motorists who travel that road.

I was disappointed that the budget offered nothing towards the Sarina community's request for pedestrian safety upgrades, particularly on the Anzac Street level crossing. Hundreds of kids cross there daily. This is a situation that needs to be addressed. The funny thing is that there are no people going back and forth on another street in Sarina that crosses the same railway line, yet there are proper boom gates there to stop pedestrians from accessing the railway line. Where the high school is located, there is nothing. This needs to be addressed. We do not want any of our kids put in danger.

There are many other roads in Mirani that require maintenance and safety work. As a result of the rain we have just had there has been lots of damage to dirt roads, and we need to ensure they are all looked after. We are talking to the councils every day in an attempt to get that maintenance underway. Construction is now underway on the \$367 million Rookwood Weir, which will help to expand agricultural production into the Lower Fitzroy agricultural corridor by providing an extra 86,000 megalitres of water.

At Stanwell, which is a much needed power station—it is only young—\$50.4 million has been signed off for the capital maintenance to replace and refurbish existing infrastructure. The moneys will be spent on overhauls and other sustaining projects to deliver improved reliability of electrical supply to Queensland—good, steady coal-fired power, which we all need. We should never look back on making sure that we build more coal-fired power stations, I believe. While there are many misguided calls to close—

Mr Berkman: No-one's going to build them.

Mr ANDREW: We have to build them.

Mr Berkman interjection.

Mr ANDREW: I take the interjection from the Greens member here, but when the dishwashers shut down and the phone towers shut down, it will not be because of coal-fired power.

Mr Berkman: That's exactly why it happened.

Mr ANDREW: Where were the renewables to back it?

Mr Berkman interjected.

Mr ANDREW: We have invested too much in it. We also know that coal-fired power stations are key to providing reliable power generation, which drives growth and development in the regions. It has for many years, and I am sure it will for many years to come. At any given time in Queensland, up to 80 per cent of the state's electricity is powered by fossil fuels. A considerable amount of it comes from our coal, because it is the best in the world. That is why we love using it; we will continue to use it and we should use more of it.

I was pleased to see that work is underway on the \$1 billion Olive Downs coalmine at Moranbah. Great, bring it on. We need the jobs and we also need the energy it produces. This project will generate considerable wealth and employment opportunities for the people of Queensland. The mine will create many hundreds of jobs over the life of the project and up to 1,000 long-term regional support jobs.

There was also \$4.5 million in the budget for expanding the heavy automotive facilities at the Mackay Ooralea Trade Training Centre, which offers vital opportunities for Central Queenslanders to acquire valuable skills for the future. I am a dual tradesman. We need to ensure our future apprentices get every opportunity they possibly can to learn their trades.

Some \$20.6 million was signed off for the new Sarina Hospital. That is great news, because that community is growing. Once it is completed, this project will provide Mirani with a first-class purpose-built hospital and new staff accommodation, which we are very pleased to accept. Many hospital and health facilities in the region were given generous allocations that will benefit the people of Mirani, including \$562 million to the Mackay HHS for upgrades and expansion, as well as 128 desperately needed extra beds at the Mackay Base Hospital.

Other spending allocations of benefit to my electorate include \$60 million for Rockhampton Airport's new aviation repair facility. I am sure the member for Rockhampton will be happy to receive that funding, which will also assist our people in Mirani. It will provide jobs and growth in the whole region. The seat of Mirani has a burgeoning young population, and many schools in the electorate are going to be bursting at the seams within a few years. I welcome the \$3,816,000 towards maintenance and refurbishment works at many schools throughout the electorate. Those receiving funds include Mount Morgan State School, Bouldercombe State School, Dundula State School—where I went—Swayneville State School in Sarina and Mirani State High School.

In other good news, \$1.5 million has been given to upgrade the hall, kitchen and dining facilities at the Kinchant Dam Outdoor Education Centre. Kinchant Waters will provide a safe haven for veterans and for people of the community to visit. We gladly welcome this. Unfortunately, the electorate missed out on moneys for a new school this year, but we do have one being built in Mackay, just outside the electorate.

The Appropriation Bill reveals that higher royalties, stamp duties and other taxes have helped to deliver Queensland's \$1.9 billion operating surplus and a lower deficit than was previously forecast. State revenue is up by over \$10 billion, or 15.9 per cent on the last financial year. Total royalty revenue for 2021-22 is a stunning \$9.1 billion, with most royalties coming from coal, at \$7.3 billion—much higher than was predicted. Coal, oil and gas prices are now at record highs, which has greatly boosted the government's coffers for the year.

However, the record prices for commodities have had the effect of driving up energy costs for struggling households and industry across Queensland. I was, therefore, disappointed that more was not done in the budget to help Queenslanders deal with the extraordinary cost-of-living pressures they face and will continue to face in the coming months. While the \$175 cost-of-living rebate on people's next power bill was included, this will do very little to offset the big rise in rents, mortgage payments and fuel costs that Queenslanders are being hit with. In my own seat of Mirani, the cost of fuel is a massive issue. While the federal rebate has helped offset the price of fuel, it is at an all-time high and is expected to soar higher once the rebate ends in September.

As many in the House would know, anything that moves on wheels in this country relies on fuel. There is nothing in Queensland that was not delivered on the back of a semitrailer run by diesel. Therefore, any fluctuation in fuel prices makes a huge difference to the cost of living for those in the bush and the regions because of the travel they do. I am sure you would understand that, Mr Deputy Speaker. A lot of people in my electorate are forced to take their children to school each day. There are people in my electorate just north of Rockhampton who drive up to 100 kilometres a day just to take their children to school because there is no bus service where they live. In fact, there are no bus stops in the electorate, which is a big shame. It is obvious that fuel hikes will have a huge impact.

According to this year's Auditor-General's report, the Palaszczuk government has added more than 34,000 workers to the public sector since 2015. The annual wages bill for this sector is now more than \$67 billion. The creation of public sector jobs removes workers from the private sector where they could be more profitably employed. More importantly, all these government funded construction projects have the effect of taking away resources from private construction; shifting vital resources away from the true wealth creators to those that are wholly dependent on the public purse.

The budget papers show that deficits will return next financial year and that the state total debt is marching towards \$130 billion. That extraordinary level of debt imposes significant costs on taxpayers both now and in the future. Upward pressure on interest rates, moreover, crowds out private investment and negatively impacts the state's economic growth. The higher interest rates on government bonds

increases the interest rates on business loans which further reduces private business confidence and investment in our state. The state's aggregated data unfortunately tells us little about what is happening with individual businesses, but clearly there are many Queenslanders who are doing it very tough today. One of the many issues they face is major constraints around recruiting suitably qualified staff. Many are calling for funding and measures to revitalise workforces by providing more skilling and retraining opportunities in Queensland. The government should be doing more to help fast-track the economic recovery of these businesses by encouraging and developing skilled workforces. This is an issue that is greatly impacting agriculture in my region and we need to sort it.

One only has to look at the current international visitor numbers, which are significantly down, to understand that Queensland tourism is a long way from being back to normal, as per my question to the tourism minister yesterday. I note there is no real increase on last year's budget commitment to deliver 7,400 new social housing properties by 2025. Only 326 homes have been built this financial year, a significant slowdown. I understand it is due to ongoing labour and supply shortages in the building industry. This is going to make it very hard for the government to deliver on the state's Housing and Homelessness Action Plan over the next three years. Hopefully we will have more residential building lots released. There is still much that needs to be done after many years of neglect. I am committed to working as hard as I can to ensure the government continues to deliver for the people of Mirani the many projects and the infrastructure they need for a strong and prosperous future.