




Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

Record of Proceedings, 15 June 2023

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; REVENUE
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (6.17 pm): I rise to speak to the appropriation bills. This year's budget confirms what millions of Queenslanders already know: without the regions Queensland suffers. Without the regions Queensland will suffer to the tune of \$18 billion, as confirmed by the budget papers. Let's put that into perspective as far as this budget goes.

It is an undeniable fact that the lion's share of those mining royalties are produced in the Burdekin electorate, home to the Bowen Basin and the majority of coalmines in this state. When we speak of the budget in the Burdekin electorate, the project that this government refers to time after time is the Moranbah Hospital, a project that was promised in the 2020 election and might be finished in late 2024, but nevertheless it is a project that I fully support.

What does that project look like compared with the contribution from the people who actually live and work in Moranbah? It equates to a paltry 0.29 per cent of the royalties produced in regional Queensland. That is right, it is not even one per cent. The project itself includes no new beds and questions still remain about whether additional services will be provided at that facility.

This is a project that still does not have a line item in the budget papers, a project that the Treasurer thinks will shut us up in the Bowen Basin and the Isaac region. I have news for the Treasurer. If he thinks that throwing less than one per cent of the coal royalties back into the Isaac is going to keep us quiet, he has another think coming because those residents are angry and the workers are even angrier.

I wonder what the residents and the workers in the Isaac think of this budget as they are bouncing down the Peak Downs Highway tonight or tearing their tyres to shreds on the Kilcummin Diamond Downs Road or the Mount Coolon Road. Do honourable members know what is most galling about this budget? It is the massive cost blowouts associated with Cross River Rail, Coomera Connector, Gold Coast Light Rail Stage 3A and the Gabba redevelopment.

There have been cost blowouts to the tune of around \$5.5 billion. All we have ever asked for, in the Burdekin electorate, is for our fair share of the royalties pie. It is abundantly clear that we are being ripped off. My constituents have a right to question this government as to why these royalties are not flowing back to the region that produced them—royalties that could pay for upgraded roads, teachers, doctors, housing and additional services. If the Peak Downs Highway is the artery, it is the Mount Coolon Road, the Kilcummin Diamond Downs Road, the Clermont Alpha Road and the May Downs Road that are the veins of the area. Whilst we have a hospital being built in Moranbah, the roads that would deliver patients to that hospital are substandard and, in many cases, nothing more than goat tracks. This is undeniable, for we have seen an ambulance vehicle destroyed on one of those roads, school bus runs suspended and train roads loaded with livestock overturned. These are the roads that are used to transport produce. These are the roads that the men and women who generated those billions of dollars in additional royalties use to travel to and from work each and every day, and they deserve better.

Whilst I am in the western area of my electorate, it is worth noting that this budget includes reannouncements such as the upgrade of the Moranbah Community Centre and additional housing in Moranbah—the first of which was an election commitment by the LNP and both of which were funded under the Resources Community Infrastructure Fund. This fund is 70 per cent funded by the resource companies and—in case anyone has forgotten—a fund that was established by the former treasurer as part of a deal on mining royalties.

I welcome the investment into education facilities in Moranbah, Coppabella and Clermont, but these investments will become missed opportunities if the government thinks that the job is done. We still have major teacher shortages, which the minister is aware of. Clermont State High School will be five teachers down on the first day next term. Today we have schools in that area where, during ATAR testing, teachers and students who are not taking part in testing, cannot access the internet. We have schools in Moranbah where teachers have to use a roster system to use their computer to access the internet.

I welcome the announcement from the minister around free kindy, but I make the point that communities like Moranbah have long waiting lists, and this announcement will mean nothing if facilities are not expanded in that community. The opportunity for a better future for our communities and for the students themselves cannot be forgotten. I will continue to fight on behalf of all the constituents in the electorate to ensure that opportunity is realised.

Education, and more specifically training, is a missed opportunity in the Burdekin area. While large sections of the TAFE college in Home Hill fall to wrack and ruin, we have key industries that are calling out for skilled staff. By realising this opportunity, we would provide jobs for locals and ensure food security during uncertain times globally.

An extra \$10 billion in royalties was received by this government during this financial year. Despite that astronomical figure, there is no money to improve flood resilience on the Bruce Highway to ensure people can get to medical appointments and to ensure that our state's key highway is not thrown into chaos every year. There is no money to improve safety on the Peter Delamothé Road or the Collinsville Road where, in the space of a few kilometres, one of the railway lines that makes those royalties possible crosses the road several times, and there is not one overpass in sight.

I previously mentioned the issues that are faced on the Bruce Highway north of Bowen, where every wet season we see traffic come to a standstill, sometimes for days at a time. These closures strand travellers, they bring freight along the coast to a halt and they prevent people from accessing medical services. That highway is the artery of the north, and it needs upgrading and maintenance. It is disappointing to see in this budget that there are no new funding arrangements for the 200 kilometres of the Bruce Highway which runs through my electorate.

Turning to health, there is no money for a CT scanner at the Ayr Hospital. What does that mean? It means that up to 15 times a week, an ambulance is used to transport patients to Townsville for CT scans after hours. In addition to the impact on ambulance services and the patient being transported, the current system effectively takes up one nurse position just in transfers. For the price of just 12 days of this government's policy of outsourcing to the big four consulting companies, so much more could have been achieved. The omission of this scanner is best described as a missed opportunity. That is the theme of this budget—missed opportunities.

The promises from this government to improve our health system are promises that they will be held to account on. This government also needs to understand that in areas like Bowen, people need to travel for medical appointments. I have focused on opportunities to make our communities better, but in this case I am referring to access to essential medical services. In Bowen, sadly, access to specialist appointments can be difficult, if not impossible, due to a lack of transport services. I take this opportunity to call on the Minister for Health to give this lack of access the attention that is needed and the attention that it deserves. The Burdekin electorate is proud of the massive contribution that it makes to the Queensland economy. When we contribute an additional \$10 billion, all we ask for is our fair share. All we ask for is for opportunities to be made realities.

I move on to my shadow portfolios. The Leader of the Opposition during his budget reply speech spoke of the need to listen to victims of crime and of the LNP's commitment to include a victim of crime on the Sentencing Advisory Council. Like the Leader of the Opposition, I hear from victims every day, and I also hear from police officers throughout the state. If you want a true picture of the youth crime crisis, it is victims and police officers who will paint that picture. Just like victims of crime, police officers across Queensland will be appalled to know that between September 2020 and March 2023, full-time frontline police numbers have fallen by 72 officers. In the lead-up to the 2020 election, Queenslanders

were promised 2,025 extra police personnel by 2025, including 1,450 additional sworn officers. Halfway through we actually have fewer police—an absolute kick in the guts for our serving police, for Queenslanders and for victims of crime. There is an important issue here. Attrition is outstripping recruitment—a fact that the minister seems to be oblivious to. Unless the minister addresses the appalling attrition rate within the QPS, we will continue to see a negative figure when it comes to the policing numbers in this state.


Funding for the replacement of the Townsville police academy and for the relocation of the Oxley academy, the Dog Squad and the Specialist Response Group is limited, to say the least. Yet again, this government is asking Queenslanders to believe that they will deliver when it comes to police. Based on their track record, I do not see Queenslanders falling for that. Let me give you some examples of cost blowouts from last year to this year: the Cairns police facility upgrade, a 15 per cent increase; Caloundra South, 50 per cent; Cooroy police, 33 per cent; Dalby police, 36 per cent; Dayboro police, 20 per cent. When you add up all those figures, it amounts to tens of millions of dollars in cost blowouts just in police facilities.

All Queenslanders support the notion of keeping our youth engaged and active to help deter crime and to help them achieve their full potential—something that PCYCs throughout the state have done for decades. I note that this budget includes more than \$50 million to support PCYC programs and to implement a restructure. Given that taxpayers are helping to fund the restructure and given the recent revelations regarding the culture within the PCYCs across this state, I ask the minister to confirm that these additional contributions will end the excuses when it comes to him providing answers. You cannot commit more than \$50 million of taxpayers' funds and expect the taxpayer to believe you when you dodge responsibility.

I move on to the Queensland Fire and Emergency Service and some of their projects and cost blowouts: Airlie Beach, 27 per cent; Greater Springfield, 82 per cent; Gympie South 25 per cent; Moreton Bay Central, 13; Mount Cotton, 46 per cent. Clearly, this minister should not be trusted to build a chook house when you look at the blowouts in the facilities across the police and fire and emergency service portfolios. There have been tens of millions of dollars in cost blowouts—where is the accountability? The minister needs to explain why it has taken more than a year to allocate funding to purchase land for new fire stations. Most of all, the minister needs to give staff and volunteers the details of a disaster and emergency management reform program. Whilst more than \$40 million has been directed to this program, we have no idea what the additional positions actually are. It is impossible for those of us on this side of the House—for Queenslanders, staff or volunteers—to support this expenditure and this program without the details. Those brave men and women who respond when Queenslanders call for help deserve answers and details. Given the disbandment of the current QFES is scheduled for 1 July 2024, time is running out to treat those people with the dignity and respect that they deserve.

In the corrections sphere, this budget confirms our worst fears. Overcrowding continues to increase and, as a direct result, the safety of the staff in those facilities has been put more at risk. The budget confirms what we have been told. There have been increases in assaults in our prisons—serious assaults. Prisoner-on-officer assaults have remained at the same rate as last year when they should be zero. Our custodial officers have the right to feel safe in the workplace. There has been a seven per cent increase in prisoner-on-officer assaults; a six per cent increase in serious prisoner-on-prisoner assaults; and a 29 per cent increase in prisoner-on-prisoner assaults. Prisoners returning to corrective services with a new correctional sanction within two years have also increased. Offenders who have been discharged from community correctional orders who return with a new correctional sanction within two years have also increased. These are sobering figures when you look at our corrective services system.

Sitting suspended from 6.31 pm to 7.30 pm.

 **Mr LAST:** The inclusion of funding for design work, site investigations and other preliminary works for the expansion of the Townsville correctional precinct and an enhanced primary healthcare facility at the Brisbane Correctional Centre indicate that, in light of all the previous promises, we may finally see action to fully address overcrowding. I would ask the minister what consultation has been done with regard to the Townsville facility. We know that in the last budget corrections staff increases totalled nine and that not one of those nine positions was for a custodial corrections officer, we know that firefighters worked 27 overtime shifts every single day to keep Queenslanders safe, and we know that police resources are stretched beyond breaking point in the middle of a youth crime crisis.

Whether you look across the state in areas like police and emergency services or at my electorate of Burdekin, one thing is very clear when it comes to this budget: it is built on a river of gold, earned in Queensland by Queenslanders. The budget documents even admit that this is a river of gold that will

largely dry up in the coming years. The question is: what have we achieved with that river of gold? Have we made the most of the opportunities presented to us? The answer, sadly, is: no, we have not. The reason is that this government is in a state of chaos and crisis. It is Queenslanders who are paying the price for that chaos.

It is often said that actions speak louder than words. This morning we heard the Premier say that this government is listening and acting. The performance of this government and this budget show that, until October 2024 at least, Queenslanders will need to endure a government that is big on words but fails to act.