




Speech By  
**James Lister**

**MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS**

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Record of Proceedings, 15 June 2023

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

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (9.41 pm): I rise to make a contribution to these cognate money bills on behalf of the people of Southern Downs. Members in this chamber will know that I tend to place a very local focus on bills that come before this House and there is plenty to be discussed regarding the budget for my electorate of Southern Downs. I looked closely at the budget and it provides not much that is new in my electorate.

I do not say that we received nothing, but most of the announcements are simply continuing funding for projects that have already been announced, such as the Toowoomba to Warwick pipeline, Gore Highway safety upgrades between Toowoomba and Millmerran—some of that will be in my electorate—and the Warwick State High School school hall. I would like to thank the government and the minister for that because that will be great for them. Every second year Warwick State High School puts on a fantastic theatrical production. They just finished this year's production, *The Age of Rock*, and it was outstanding. I hope that those facilities will enable them to perform at home rather than having to go to the Warwick Town Hall.

The Goondiwindi Hospital upgrades, including air conditioning and the switchboard, are good stuff and I acknowledge the government for that. I know that the government is assisting the Goondiwindi Regional Council with the roof replacement on the Inglewood reservoir and there are ongoing improvements which have been going for several years to the visitor facilities at Girraween National Park.

I want to talk a little bit about the Toowoomba to Warwick pipeline that we have heard so much about. I need to put on record that this is not a panacea for the water difficulties that my electorate has faced. I am always cautious about biting the hand that feeds us. I acknowledge the government's investment in a pipeline to take water theoretically from the South-East Queensland grid down to Warwick. It is a nice thing to have, but what I do not know is what the cost will be to ratepayers. Given that it is looking like \$300-odd million I ask the question: why is the government persisting in building a pipeline from someone else's scarce supply to the town that did not run out of water instead of spending half as much to build Emu Swamp Dam in the town that did run out of water—Stanthorpe—that would not only give surety of supply to the residents of Stanthorpe but also to the horticultural producers who are the economic lifeblood of our community? I know the Minister for Water understands those things. I would love to see funding for Emu Swamp Dam in this budget.

**Mrs Gerber:** Hear, hear.

**Mr LISTER:** These interjections suggest that I have been silent on the matter of Emu Swamp Dam. Does anyone else think that? I appreciate that a project like Emu Swamp Dam would ordinarily be funded jointly by the federal and state governments. That is a normal process for a project like this.

Given that the town of Stanthorpe did run out of water and for 16 months had to have drinking water trucked to Stanthorpe at great expense to the state government—and I do thank them for that—the water supply situation for Stanthorpe has not been dealt with. It will rear its ugly head again. If the predictions that we hear at the moment are to be believed, we are heading for another period of dryness and drought.

It would be very sad to see Stanthorpe go through the difficulties it did before when it ran out of town water. Not only did it mean that the supply was restricted for the consumers in Stanthorpe but also it had an adverse impact on the local economy because people from Brisbane, the Sunshine Coast and the Gold Coast who frequent Stanthorpe for the tourism experiences and B&Bs and so forth, in intending to do the right thing, did not come because they were concerned about depriving us of our water. That really hurt local businesses and the local economy. It also impacted the population who live on the Granite Belt outside of the town of Stanthorpe. About half of the Granite Belt's population live in Stanthorpe and half live in the country areas and villages. Those people did not collect rainwater because of the drought so they were dependent on driving into town with a thousand-litre pod on the back of their ute to fill up in town from the municipal supply. That had to stop because of the drought. It was only through the extraordinary efforts of volunteers and generous donors and benefactors from all over Queensland, particularly on the Gold and Sunshine Coasts, that they got any water. The member for Bonney personally drove a ute full of water up for my constituents on the Granite Belt and I am grateful to him for that.

If Stanthorpe is to grow, if Stanthorpe is even to remain viable as it is now, it needs a solution to its water problem. It goes without saying that the horticultural production on the Granite Belt is extremely efficient. One megalitre of water produces \$70,000 worth of leafy green vegetables at the farm gate. It is a very effective use of water, it is an effective way of providing food security, and it is a very labour intensive industry. Having water for our growers to produce that food causes great flow-on effects through the local economy and that is something we should really be looking at. I will continue to on occasion whisper the name 'Emu Swamp Dam' and hope that the minister and the government can at some stage find their way back to the table on that project.

The housing situation in my electorate is dire. I see the housing minister in the chamber. Her predecessor answered a letter I wrote to her asking about the share of houses from the state government's investment in public housing. I understand there were about 5,700 houses intended over a certain period. At the time about 80 or 90 were destined for the Darling Downs area, including Southern Downs, and only four were destined for my electorate which, I imagine, apportioned appropriately, would be one in Goondiwindi, one in Stanthorpe and maybe two in Warwick.

We are currently facing a situation where we cannot get public servants, teachers and police into the community because all of the government houses are full and there is nothing for rent. It is especially a problem for the private sector. There are businesses who are crying out for staff but they cannot get them even though they may be willing because Goondiwindi is a great community, a great place to live, for want of housing. I may be corrected, but I believe that Goondiwindi has the lowest vacancy rate of any town in the state of Queensland. It is ridiculously low. It more than allows for the time to vacate and bring another tenant in. People are doing it tough. That is quite apart from the obvious social consequences of people not being able to find homes when projects like the MacIntyre Wind Farm progress and there is an influx of workers coming for those good jobs and they take houses. It is understandable that with their better buying power they will secure those houses for rent. It has left people worrying that they will be without a home. It has left people who need to move into the area unable to find a house.

The housing crisis is more than a slogan. It means something very significant in Goondiwindi, Stanthorpe, Warwick and places all over the state. For example, the nursing home in Goondiwindi, Kaloma, is an outstanding institution that is run by and for the people of Goondiwindi. Even in the current environment where there is great demand for nursing homes, it has closed about a dozen beds because of a lack of staff. The main impediment to hiring staff is not the labour market, which obviously is stretched, but that there is no housing available for workers. That is very concerning.

I want to talk about electricity. The budget provides for a new rebate that ostensibly is supposed to benefit all Queenslanders. I take that to mean Queenslanders in my electorate of Southern Downs as well. However, it is far from certain that my electors who live in the localities of Wallangarra, Texas, Inglewood, Goondiwindi and beyond, in places like Toobeah, Bungunyah and Talwood, who source their electricity from New South Wales, will benefit from the rebate. I have written to the Treasurer and asked him to confirm that those electors in my electorate will be able to benefit from the \$550 rebate and in the case of small business the \$650 rebate. I will be very disappointed if the answer is no. I know that the Treasurer or his staff will be watching. I ask that, when he responds to the second reading debate, the minister clarifies whether those customers in my electorate of Southern Downs and perhaps

in other parts—I wonder whether the member for Warrego has constituents who are supplied with electricity from New South Wales—will be able to benefit from the electricity rebate. I want to talk about crime in Goondiwindi.

**Ms Leahy** interjected.

**Mr LISTER:** I take that interjection from my honourable friend the member for Warrego. It is horrendous at the moment. I am always in two minds about speaking about the horror of the crime that is going on because the people of Goondiwindi are proud and they have an outstanding community that, in every other respects, is the envy of many places around Australia. They do not like to be labelled. As I have said in the past, Goondiwindi is not Mogadishu but you could be forgiven for thinking so this week because many outrageous crimes have been committed. About a dozen crimes occurred on Tuesday night and Wednesday morning of this week. I spoke about those incidents in the adjournment debate on Wednesday night. I will not go into so many details because I am no longer certain that the perpetrators have not been apprehended or charged. Out of an abundance of caution I will not speak in detail about them.

The crimes that occurred involved a spate of outrageous home invasions and also motel room invasions. The offenders had identified a car that they wanted to steal from a car park space. They kicked down the door of that particular motel room and assaulted, in some cases viciously, the occupants of the rooms to take their car keys. On Wednesday night I spoke about the effects on a prominent citizen of Goondiwindi, Councillor Susie Kelly, who is a much beloved member of the community. Susie Kelly and her family were subjected to a very frightening home invasion. I am hearing that these invasions and attacks are now being committed with more and more violence. Years ago it used to be that it was almost just cheeky action by some kids. These days the perpetrators are favouring the use of pre-emptive violence against good people in order to steal their car keys and there have been some very serious assaults.

I want to go on the record in this House, and I have said it before, that I believe that if this situation is not addressed then deaths will occur, either of perpetrators because of defensive actions by the victims or of victims because of the assault by the perpetrators, or because of misadventure and the unlawful use of a motor vehicle. That is my belief.

Yesterday in the chamber I heard the Attorney-General talking about how the LNP is too fixed on the idea of simply locking up individual youth offenders. We all get that it is not good for youths to be incarcerated. However, we cannot look at that in isolation. Anybody who says, 'This is a complex issue and, therefore, we have to allow a situation where they are on the streets night after night' is effectively saying that good people in our communities who live by and uphold the laws must simply tolerate the crime until Labor's policies have dealt with the causes, complex though they are.

I say that measures need to be taken now such as unshackling magistrates so that they can order a custodial arrangement for a youth offender who comes before them so that that offender cannot go back onto the streets to reoffend. At the moment the law says that detention is a last resort. That is not good enough because the people in Goondiwindi, Stanthorpe, Warwick, everywhere else in my electorate and, in fact, everywhere else in Queensland are entitled to nothing less than the protection of the government through the laws that they pass.

I simply put it this way: in Goondiwindi people are dismayed and aghast. Recently I have been inundated with complaints from constituents, including people who may never before have complained to a politician about their lot. Goondiwindi is a town that prides itself on getting itself where it needs to go under its own steam. People cannot sleep at night. People are traumatised by what has happened to them, including people in the electorate of the member for Warrego. This is not a simple question about the ideology of balancing society's needs in terms of rehabilitating youth offenders and looking after the community. You cannot have both at the same time in Goondiwindi. That is the practical effect on the ground and I am quite certain I speak for other places where there is rampant youth crime. We need to ensure that persistent youth offenders are locked up in some way or fashion to prevent them from continuing to commit crimes.