




Speech By  
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**MEMBER FOR BONNEY**

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

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (9.22 pm): This is Labor's ninth budget. After nearly a decade of inaction and wasted opportunities, things are finally starting to catch up with them. Queenslanders just do not trust them to do what they say they will do. That is absolutely the case for my community on the Gold Coast. The new hospital at Coomera is a prime example. We are getting only a fraction of the funding this year, so even when this is built towards the end of this decade it will come too late and with not enough beds. That means Gold Coast University Hospital, which already has the busiest emergency department in the nation, will continue to be under enormous strain for many years to come.

We have also found out this week that there are 72 fewer police on the front line in Queensland than before the last state election. For my community, with some of the highest rates of domestic violence in our state, that is extremely concerning.

It has also been more than half a decade since work supposedly began on planning and building the second M1. Construction is only just beginning, and the QTRIP in this budget shows that it will still be happening after 2027. The full stage 1, from Carrara to Coomera, will not be finished for at least four years. We still have not seen the design for the section in my area, so locals have no idea if it has adequate sound barriers. Not having an alternative road to the M1 for local Gold Coast traffic means that driving anywhere in our city is a nightmare. Lack of infrastructure like this is a big handbrake on housing supply.

Housing is the No. 1 issue for my community. I represent a lot of renters, and they have never done it as tough as they are doing it now. There is not much in this budget that will make these renters' lives easier. Without more properties being available, this crisis will not be solved. Social housing is an important part of the mix. I proudly represent Labrador, which has the highest proportion of social housing properties of any suburb on the Gold Coast. It is important for the broader market, because every vulnerable Queenslanders in a social housing property is someone who is not competing for another rental, but the government is failing to deliver this vital safety net. The recent Productivity Commission report showed the state government had built only 1,395 properties, despite repeatedly claiming they had built over 4,000. It found that every other state has increased community housing numbers but that Queensland has 91 fewer homes under Labor.

Not a single new home has been built under their Housing Investment Fund. Instead of following up and looking into why this money was not doing what it was supposed to, the government could not resist the opportunity for another announcement so they doubled the fund. It is like something out of Utopia, which is of course a great show on the ABC but is not meant to be a guide for how to run a state government. There is zero focus on outcomes. All they care about is how big the number in the press release is.

More housing, of course, does not mean development at all costs. I have fought alongside my community against inappropriate proposals which would have put density among the beautiful houses of Labrador and ripped up the vital green space of Arundel Hills. We need to encourage development in the right places. That is the biggest challenge the Gold Coast faces as we head towards having a population of a million people in the next decade or sooner.

In Labrador that means accepting more density along the water and along Frank Street. It means having rapid public transport along Olsen Avenue, from the hospital and Griffith University to Harbour Town, to make sure we can better utilise a corridor that has great potential. On the Harbour Town precinct itself, I was briefed by Lewis Land a few weeks ago about their plans for Harbour Shores, with construction starting next year on the empty blocks along Oxley Drive next to Biggera Creek. In a decade, around 4½ thousand people will call this area home. They have further plans for the rest of this hub, and the best thing government can do to support this huge housing opportunity is to have a plan for better transport infrastructure connecting to Harbour Town. The Parkwood golf course has five-storey retirement living towers being built which will be home to hundreds of people, and locals have few concerns about this. This type of proposal, with a limited footprint, could have been proposed for Arundel Hills, and I am sure it would have got community support.

There are two substantial state owned blocks of land in my electorate, on the edge of Smith Collective in the Gold Coast Health and Knowledge Precinct on Smith Street. They are zoned residential and are right near Griffith University and the Gold Coast University Hospital. This is land that has no remnant habitat, it is next to multistorey buildings, it has a major motorway and light rail as transport connections, and of course it has the best Woolworths around and hopefully more and more eating options. Lot 1A and lot 1B in the Health and Knowledge Precinct together add up to 16½ thousand square metres. I want this state owned land to be used for student housing, health worker housing or a combination of both. Surely a proposal of at least developing multistorey buildings like the existing Smith Collective could be fast-tracked. I ask the state development minister what time frame the government believes something could be built here in. These are some of the largest and most ideally located sites on the Gold Coast, and they are owned by the state government. Let's talk to the market about getting a residential development underway. Surely the Housing Investment Fund could support building affordable student and health worker housing on this site. It would bring more people into the precinct which grows this hub, and it would be good news for the hospitality venues there.

The vacant land around Westfield Helensvale is another unrealised opportunity for substantial housing in a key precinct. This area has every possible transport connection. The state government and council should be sitting down with landholders to get a plan together to put density here.

I welcome the last bit of funding in this budget for Coombabah State High School's new health and sports science centre, with new classrooms, change rooms, a commercial kitchen, a kinesiology lab and a health room to deliver their certificate III in health services with specialised beds. We need similar investments in Arundel State School to replace their demountables with a multistorey permanent building. Musgrave Hill needs more funding for their early years precinct, Labrador State School should have their proposal for a cover over their tennis court funded, and Southport State High School is bursting at the seams, so they need a new sports hall.

This is my fourth budget as the shadow environment minister, and in every single one Labor has talked a big game on the environment, but when you look at the detail and you measure the outcomes they simply do not deliver. This cannot be clearer than when it comes to protected areas. Way back in 2015 Labor set a target of protecting 17 per cent of Queensland. At that point our estate was sitting at 7.8 per cent. This budget shows that almost a decade later it is at just 8.38 per cent. That is just over half a per cent more of Queensland protected in nearly a decade.

Last year we finally saw a new \$250 million fund announced—the first and only decent injection of funds into this made by Labor—but there were two issues. Firstly it was back ended so, despite years of inaction, Labor's time line meant that it would need to be re-elected a fourth time to deliver only just a small part of what it promised at the start of its time in government. Half the funding is expected to be spent in the final year of the program. We are in a biodiversity crisis. Climate change is making this worse. Better conservation is taking too long and it is likely that this government will not have increased the protected estate by even one per cent in almost a decade.

The second problem with this funding is it is only to increase the public protected area estate. Labor has no interest in properly funding private protected areas. The only way we are going to increase conservation land in this state to a level which will give us some chance of protecting our biodiversity and stopping extinctions will be by working with private landholders. There will be more and more market desire for this as well. The government needs to provide a down payment and it needs to create

the right framework to make it easy for landholders if they choose to be part of this. Right now it is too complex and management funding is completely inadequate. It is nowhere near enough to incentivise landholders to make their property a nature refuge.

Expanding the protected area estate must happen hand in hand with better management. Feral pigs are one of the greatest threats to our environment and to our agricultural sector. National parks have become their sanctuaries. Biosecurity Queensland estimated in 2021 that our state is home to 2.3 million of them and the damage feral pigs do to our conservation estate is devastating. They contribute to the spread of invasive plants and diseases; they damage wetlands, crops and livestock; they impact the quality of soil and water and prey on native species, including going after the eggs of young birds and turtles. They are just one of the invasive species impacting our protected areas which means we need better investment in management.

Putting a conservation status on land is not enough on its own. It needs to be looked after. What I cannot understand is why more resourcing is being delayed. The budget included new world-class protected area management funding, but what kind of world-class management are we going to get this year with less than a million dollars being allocated to this new program? How far will that stretch across our state? There is more money allocated for future years, but the environment minister needs to explain why we need to wait until 2027-28 to get up to \$10 million in one year as planned. It is needed now and you just have to talk to any farmer from across Queensland who backs on to a national park to find out how well it could be spent.

In line with the LNP leader's comments about empowering our Public Service, we really need to see more value placed on our Parks and Wildlife Service. A good start would be giving it its own line item as key frontline staff in the government's workforce profile reports. These are passionate environmental experts who deserve support to make sure they can do what they signed up to do—care for Queensland. They are out working to control invasive species; to manage fire trails and fuel loads; to ensure lives, property and biodiversity are protected. They upkeep park facilities for Queenslanders and for people from across the world to enjoy. Where we see national parks undermanaged it is squarely the fault of the state government, not the rangers on the ground. They go above and beyond with the resources that they are provided. Without more support, they will continue to struggle to achieve what they can see needs to happen in our protected estate.

With regard to resource recovery, the underspend on the Resource Recovery Industry Development Program where barely a third was rolled out and the slow pace of the Recycling Modernisation Fund where we lagged behind every other state in the nation shows that the government is failing to support investment in recycling facilities. It could not even recycle poppers in our state and exported tens of millions of them interstate and overseas. Just \$22 million of the \$1.1 billion Recycling and Jobs Fund has been spent. Queensland has the worst recycling rate of any state in the nation. A focus on outcomes is urgently needed for the management of our waste.

The Great Barrier Reef was all but missing from the budget. It is our greatest natural environment. It is under serious threat from climate change and water quality, yet it barely rated a mention in the budget. While the reasoning for not reaching some of the effectiveness measures in the SDS for reef water quality programs was the magnitude of the problem before us, there is seemingly no targeted increase in funding to help address the issue. I found out through answers to questions on notice that the government's support to Life Sciences Queensland has been cut, so it was positive to see some funding for strategic science and international partnerships included as a new budget measure.

It was hard to find anything in the budget on innovation. A recent Australian startup funding report found that Queensland had just eight per cent of all venture capital raised across Australia over the last year—less than half of what it was six years ago. I am happy to see ground finally being broken on projects in the Health and Knowledge Precinct more than half a decade after the Commonwealth Games ended. We still have no funding from the state government for Griffith University's ADaPT 2.0 building though. The LNP committed to fund a third of this at the last state election and I am again calling on the government to pick up the phone and work with its federal colleagues to figure out a funding deal for this facility. The Gold Coast cannot just rely on tourism, hospitality and construction jobs; we need the government to invest in this building to connect students with world-class industries that will further innovation in our state.

Finally, when it comes to the youth portfolio, this government made it abundantly clear the value it puts on young people when it forgot to assign it as a portfolio to a minister in its recent reshuffle. We did find it buried in the Department of Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and the Arts SDS, but there was very little mention of youth. Being forgotten and cast aside gives no confidence to young Queenslanders that their voices will be heard by this government.

I will finish where I started: after nearly a decade, Queenslanders just do not trust Labor to deliver what it says it will. It is a great honour for me to represent my community in this place and I will keep advocating for what the people in my part of the Gold Coast need the most.