



Speech By
Samuel O'Connor

MEMBER FOR BONNEY

Record of Proceedings, 22 August 2023


APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation Bill

Health and Environment Committee, Report

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (5.01 pm): I rise to address the environment estimates hearings and what we were able to find out this year in the time we had available. The Pioneer-Burdekin Pumped Hydro project is the biggest project in our state's history—in fact, it is the biggest project of its type in the world—and it underpins the government's plan for a transition to renewable energy. As someone who is interested in the action our state is taking on climate change I asked quite a few questions about this. Unfortunately, very few details have been provided to Queenslanders about the project, especially when it comes to potential impacts on the beautiful biodiverse environment of this area and neighbouring Eungella National Park.

At estimates we got very little clarity on the role the department of environment has played in this project so far. We were told the environment department was intimately involved with the selection of the site but provided with few details on what their advice was. The department said this project is at the early stages of development, which means that none of the environmental assessments have even started, let alone been completed. The project design is still nowhere near being finalised. As I raised at the hearing, the Pioneer-Burdekin Pumped Hydro environment fact sheet is just two pages long. It says that no project will proceed if impacts to the local environment cannot be adequately mitigated or offset. We have no certainty about whether this will stack up environmentally. No-one can confidently say that Pioneer-Burdekin is a given, and if they do they have no respect for environmental approval processes. Disappointingly, when the Treasurer was asked if it is possible a different site might need to be chosen if issues arise with Pioneer-Burdekin he said, 'No, we are absolutely confident that this will go ahead.' How can he possibly be so sure when none of the work has been done?

The other issue I raised at the hearings was subsidence, which we have seen in the much smaller Snowy Hydro 2.0 project. Pioneer-Burdekin will involve three multi-kilometre tunnels under a national park. We received no assurance this risk has even been considered by the department which manages these parks. The lack of detail on such a major project from Labor after nearly a decade in power is pretty standard behaviour and gives no certainty to Queenslanders who want to see genuine climate action. We did get a commitment from the minister to visit Eungella with the member for Mirani, who I think was going to give her a bit of a tour. I hope that happens as soon as possible with a briefing on the aspects of this project which relate to the neighbouring national park. I have been there and met the locals. They just want to be heard.

In relation to Linc Energy, we were told it was purely coincidence that data from bore sampling in February this year, over six months ago, was only uploaded the night before estimates. On the day before estimates the most recent data on the department's website was from October 2022 which was, in another coincidence, around the same time the media reported on high levels of cyanide and benzene at these sites. Once again we see that, when the media stops looking, the government stops being transparent. I know it does take time to complete the laboratory analyses of these samples, but surely it does not take the many months it currently does. Queenslanders deserve to see this data in a timelier manner.

Queensland is the worst state in the nation for recycling. The department's own data shows that our state is only on track to meet two of the government's seven targets. We were not able to be provided with an updated assessment of where our state is at. On poppers, or liquid paperboard containers, once again we see the government claim credit when the Containers for Change scheme is going well, but when there is an issue they keep their distance and palm it off to the scheme operator. We were told that an audit was conducted of the tens of millions of these containers collected by Queenslanders and shipped to India, but when access was refused to that audit nothing further was done by the government. It is not good enough for the government to just send these items overseas and hope for the best. We cannot do it here because our industry has not been supported—from the underspend in funding programs related to the waste levy to the regulatory uncertainty they are facing. With regard to the expansion of that container deposit scheme to wine and spirit bottles, we are still hearing from stakeholders about issues with how this expansion is being implemented and the complete lack of clarity they are receiving. It was disappointing that we could not get further details about the cost-benefit analysis of expanding the scheme or even be provided with any data to show it will increase recycling rates. Clearly Queenslanders back expanding the scheme, but it should be evidence based and producers and suppliers should be given more notice.

Finally, on the Scientific Consensus Statement, the central policy document for the Great Barrier Reef, we found out there was a two-year delay. It should not take estimates hearings for us to figure that out. It should be provided to Queenslanders.

(Time expired)