




Speech By
Sandy Bolton

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

Record of Proceedings, 15 June 2023

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

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (10.23 pm): Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the 2023-24 budget. Before heading into specifics, it is appreciated that the cost of living has been a focus of this budget, and for many the electricity rebates and free kindy are very welcome; however, there is a question of how this is funded. I realise that the surplus and royalties have been mentioned, but with a reported \$1.721 billion increase in tax revenue, is this a case of taking on one hand from those who can ill afford it and then providing it back on the other hand in the form of support?

With a record net operating surplus of more than \$12 billion, I appreciate efforts to pay down debt; however, given what it is costing in support and health services to tackle increased poor mental and physical health due to the housing crisis and ongoing fallout from COVID, why is more not being injected into housing from this surplus? Studies of homelessness have shown that the provision of housing costs governments and taxpayers less than the ramifications of homelessness.

In amongst the many non-location-specific announcements that are welcome are incentives for GPs and healthcare workers to relocate to Queensland, high-visibility police patrols and improved access to emergency departments, surgery and mental health support, which we desperately need. However, the devil is in the detail—namely, where these will be funded from. In the coming weeks we hope to find out.

Another plus is additional funding in areas we have been advocating for in relation to capability and competency building across the public sector as envisaged in the Coaldrake report. Of importance is the increased role of the Queensland Public Sector Commission as a system leader to ensure those capabilities are developed. There are much needed inquiries into the responses of government in relation to COVID—as governments around Australia and the world have done—as well as the reasons for the housing crisis that were many years in the making. We have to assess these to avoid replicating any failings in the future.

I now move to Noosa-specific items. Our wish list was quite small, as many of our major projects have been completed, commenced or are in the study or recommendation stages. From the Department of Transport and Main Roads this includes: the completion of the first stage of the Beckmans Road Tewantin bypass; a new roundabout at the intersection of Cooroy and Beckmans Road—which everyone loves, it is fantastic; and the commencement of the replacement of the Six Mile Creek No. 7 bridge—and again it is really impressive. A lot of work has gone on there. In addition, there are enormous volumes of both capital and maintenance funding for the Pomona Kin Kin Road in response to the totally inappropriate volumes of heavy haulage the road was never built for. We continue to wait for a determination—it has been a year now that we have been waiting for that to be handed down by the courts—to see an end to this nightmare, and I thank all who continue to assist.

For those in progress, we have in QTRIP \$1.4 million for the planning of stage 2 of the Tewantin bypass, which is currently in the final design phase between Noosa council and TMR, and \$9.2 million from a total of \$22.5 million for the Six Mile Bridge, with completion predicted for mid-2024. Even though

not in the Noosa electorate, the lack of movement on the Cooroy intersections is of concern. It is right on my border. My constituents and those in Nicklin are daily at risk from these two notorious intersections and clarification needs to be given as to why these remain unaddressed.

Back to happy announcements, we had the sod turning for the construction of the new \$13 million state-of-the-art school hall for our Noosa District State High School, Pomona campus, which is due to be completed in readiness for the start of the 2024 school year. This is a great addition, and I thank Minister Grace and the department.

The Sunshine Beach State School is also seeing a refurbishment of block HA. However, a devastating disappointment was the omission of the advanced manufacturing unit for Sunshine Beach State High School. With the master plan for this bursting-at-the-seams school completed, to not get started does not make sense. They are turning students away because they cannot take them for studies in that particular manufacturing space. As we have no TAFE, it is especially important to ensure alternatives for training and job pathways are provided, which this unit does. It may be there is funding hidden somewhere for that detailed design and there may be a reconsideration of its urgency. We continue to wait for an announcement in relation to the future of the decommissioned TAFE site—it has been the longest journey; I have been tracking this for nine years so it is very frustrating—and the results from the feasibility study into a Noosa Learning Hub. The importance of ensuring funds are available for this in the next budget cannot be underestimated. Noosa lost its TAFE as well as our uni campus. We need a hub. Pleasingly, it is wonderful that the Lake McDonald project is now back on track, with nearly a million dollars in this budget to get started out of a total of \$127 million to meet safety requirements.

Turning to health, I attended the official opening of the transportable units at Noosa Private Hospital, which operates under an agreement with the Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service. This is to triage patients coming into the emergency department, which has limited capacity resulting in bypass mode or, should I say, load share 1 being activated 20 hours a day. Given that this adds to the ramping at SCUH and Nambour Hospital, I just do not understand why the government will not provide the requested longer lease to Ramsay so they can invest in expanding the facility permanently to avoid all of this. If that happened it would be a win-win for government, the community and the millions of visitors we receive who suffer from delayed ambulance times due to bypassing to other hospitals. Then they cannot afford to get back home to Noosa. With the budget stating improved ambulance responsiveness and access to emergency departments, here is a simple, no-cost solution. So, Minister, please, simply extend the Noosa Hospital lease.

Even though there are funding allocations in a number of realms to Noosa for mental health, alcohol and other drug psychosocial services, as well as residential rehabilitation, the amounts do not appear to be anywhere close to what is required. In addition, the fact that only \$28,000 is allocated for our electorate this year for palliative care state programs to service our needs is deeply concerning. Our communities continue to fundraise services, such as for our much loved Katie Rose Cottage, which each year requires \$2 million to provide essential end-of-life care. Again, there is no move to develop a fair and equitable model for the seven hospices across Queensland from the \$55 million allocated to invest in community-based services for palliative care until 2026. The question remains: why? Community funded models deliver these services much more economically than a hospital. This is another grassroots question that needs answering.

Then we move to the never-ending issue of housing, which I think I have spoken about in every budget now for five years. My community appreciates the purchase of Doonella Street last year for an affordable housing project and the successful funding applications put forward. We look forward to when these can be announced, including the RISE by Bendigo project to build four units for families impacted by domestic violence. However, this is only a small part of what is needed.

This budget outlined commitments across Queensland of 5,600 social and affordable home commencements via the HIF and 3,265 by June 2025 via an additional \$1.1 billion. However, as we know and as we have heard, this falls far short of what is required. QCROSS research stated a need for 11,000 new social and affordable homes each year for 20 years. In their March 2023 report, they said that there are 150,000 households across Queensland with unmet housing needs. This includes 100,000 households that would typically be eligible for social housing.

Where is the long-term housing strategy for Queensland that we have been requesting? Why, when we have a record surplus, are we not dedicating more to address this crisis right now? This has never been more important, especially with the 2032 Olympics only nine years away, which will create further accommodation hardships, as well as the extra 250,000 people who are predicted to move within 45 minutes of Noosa in the next decade. If there is not a solid strategy released quickly, we will see a catastrophe of proportions even worse than what is happening now.

Given current urgencies, there is only \$500,000 for specialist homelessness services for our area. There is nothing about needed emergency accommodation. The Department of Resources handed over a suitable site to the Sunshine Coast Council four years ago. This still sits unused and about to go out for tender, so what is really happening here?

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: I apologise, member for Noosa. Can we pause the clock. Members, there is far too much noise in the chamber. If you would like to have a conversation, please take it outside.

Ms BOLTON: When we add in the dire position regarding interest rate pressures, land tax and policy proposals driving mortgages and housing costs up, which also impact those renting, why is the government not putting in place a freeze on land tax to the 2021 valuations as we have requested? There are so many whys in this budget.

I turn to our environment. Noosa is waiting for action in response to government studies and surveys as a result of years of advocacy. Many of these issues—such as the unsustainable volume of visitors to Noosa North Shore and protecting our turtle habitats—do not require vast sums to resolve; they just require action. Our community are really angry. Others, such as the better management of our Noosa River, do require increases for the QPS, MSQ and DAF to police changes to laws; otherwise there is no point.

Our national parks continue to bear the brunt of underfunding. The Values-Based Management Framework is welcomed. However, what does it translate to on the ground? QPWS staff and volunteers continue to do an incredible job battling the impacts from the large volumes of visitors to our national parks. It is wonderful that these parks continue to be increased; however, we need the resources and legislation to manage appropriately. This includes a much needed discussion as to whether the current parameters for ecotourism ventures are appropriate. With the volume of destruction we are seeing, it is vital that a Queensland independent EPA gets operational, as it has been 18 months since the first consultations. In addition, the recommendations from the review of powers and penalties under the EP Act need to translate into a tabling of new legislation into the House as soon as possible.

I now turn to transport. Given that congestion and lack of access to public transport has escalated for Noosa—and, as I mentioned before, a predicted 250,000 people will come to live within 45 minutes of Noosa—the importance of reducing the current and future loads on the M1 and surrounding networks cannot be understated. The North Coast rail study is long overdue, and increases in rail and other forms of public transport are vital before the 2032 Olympic Games.

I move to crime. As we have seen in our many inquiries, the contributors are complex and many. We have seen the results from inquiries when recommendations are not actioned. The funding required is enormous, and it is good to see that there is \$132 million over four years dedicated to crime prevention and victim support. However, we need to see where these increased patrols and programs take place, as we do not want to keep funding 'specials' in Noosa.

Glaringly, there has been no mention of needed increases to support for our small to medium businesses. Given the ongoing hardships from lack of staff, increased rentals, inflation and monetary policy responses on interest rates, this is deeply concerning as they are our backbone. However, as part of the Tourism Experience Development Fund, monies have been awarded to RACV Noosa Resort to construct an eco precinct and to Kin Kin's Mayan Farm. Noosa council will also benefit from further funding as part of the Community Stimulus Program for the McKinnon Drive sports facility, for investigations into transit hubs and to assist with litter and illegal dumping.

In conclusion, as always, there are winners and losers in budgets—and a lot of noise in this chamber. Ultimately, the glaring issue with this one is that we should have celebrated the surplus delivered from mining royalties with announcements that address our most urgent needs, including housing. I acknowledge the complexity of putting a budget together and I congratulate the Treasurer and all of the very hardworking staff. It is not easy; however I ask that the serious shortfalls that have been identified be remedied, because as we know it is never too late.