




Speech By  
**Stephen Bennett**

**MEMBER FOR BURNETT**

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Record of Proceedings, 15 June 2023

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

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (8.00 pm): What a missed opportunity this has been for real generational infrastructure investment that would have shaped our state. We have the same story of excessive growth in the public sector, cost blowouts on every project and delays in key infrastructure projects. I note that Labor copied the 'Big Build' slogan from the failed Victorian government that, as in Queensland, has much to do with government debt and unrealistic plans that will be kicked into the never-never. We know that royalties and taxes have reached record levels in this budget, but we hear very little about the projected deficits for next year and the questionable surpluses year on year after that.

For four years we have been calling for changes to the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme and we welcome those. I do note the issues that are now confronting the people of Bundaberg, particularly with the reduction in the Tilt Train services from Bundaberg, and that this is about a lack of planning and maintenance as we see services significantly reduced. Why is this an issue? It is an issue because in Bundaberg we do not have the specialists and the necessary services for those people who need them—which necessitates regular trips to Brisbane. I note that the solution offered by the minister is for people to travel down the night before and stay another night afterwards, adding two nights extra accommodation. That is a cost-of-living pressure and \$10 extra in the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme does not solve the problem. To remove ambiguity with the issues raised about the Tilt Train services—and the minister and the member for Bundaberg are both in the House—I table the train services timetables and a summary of the changes that show the reduction in Tilt Train services. I encourage everyone with an interest in the Bundaberg-Burnett region to sign our petition calling for services and the acknowledgement of how serious this issue is.

*Tabled paper:* Documents, undated, titled 'Queensland Rail Travel: Timetables' [876](#).

I bring to the attention of the House the Queensland Health service delivery statements, pages 139 and 140, in relation to the Wide Bay Hospital and Health Service. As in every budget, health services receive cash injections but no vision or commitments to the much overdue reforms to fix the culture in the Queensland Health system. Total weighted activity units are vastly underperforming on, ironically, acute inpatient and emergency department figures. I do not understand how you can severely underperform in those areas when the answer to questions around poor emergency and elective care is that it is because we have no beds. There is less activity in those two areas and it is the worst performance in the state.

The Wide Bay HHS is 8,400 units down on the \$5,094 Queensland rate, which is roughly a \$40 million income that they are being paid but have not delivered on. The second issue in the budget papers is the expected cost per unit of activity is \$5,094 and the WBHHS has spent \$5,740 per unit of activity, which equates to an expense over income of \$70 million. The finances are clearly out of the control. Members will remember that since 2019 in this place I have been forecasting that that would happen. We know that this deep issue will have to be dealt with. On effectiveness measures, we need

to be deeply concerned about the reported numbers. They were all at 100 per cent in 2014 under the LNP and remained so until 2020 when they started to crash. The current delivery of emergency and elective services is appalling.

Let us say I am a cancer patient who was referred for an urgent consultation. I should have been seen within 30 days but only 72 per cent of people are seen in that time, so I have a seven-in-10 chance of being seen. The longer I am left the more my cancer can spread. I am then referred for various diagnostic tests that are no longer included in the statement. Endoscopy is very important and was legislated by the LNP. It has now been dropped off and is not even reported in the current budget papers. I may have to wait to get the diagnostic procedure I need before being added to the category 1 surgery wait list, which is no longer 100 per cent within 30 days. Emergency departments report that only 55 per cent of patients are treated within four hours of the clinically recommended time frames. I have also demonstrated that many patients are without appropriate care and follow-up after they present.

The statement suggests that categories 2 and 3 are no longer used for performance purposes. That is pretty disgusting when they are underperforming so badly in activity terms. The proposed numbers for 2023-24 will not be achieved as they are barely an increase on the current year. It is highly likely that the Wide Bay Hospital and Health Service will need another \$50 million to \$70 million to bail it out or it will need to go into administration. I have reported on that in this place before. I have raised these concerns in previous years. Given that they have been severely underperforming all year, I cannot see any chance of improvement and the quality will get a lot worse as finances bite even harder. It is heartbreaking to see these numbers. They are as bad as those we inherited in 2012 from the Bligh government. They were repaired and maintained at 100 per cent for seven years. The board should be held to account for allowing that deterioration and it should have kept the executive team in place instead of sacking them.

Health remains a No. 1 priority for the Burnett, especially for the Discovery Coast. The budget makes absolutely no commitment to health infrastructure in the region. How can that be when there are no healthcare services for 125 kilometres each way? Recently I received correspondence regarding the Wide Bay Hospital and Health Service's proposed multipurpose health service in Agnes Water and 'underwhelmed' is the word that comes to mind. Frustratingly, the application to the Commonwealth government for the establishment of that service was unsuccessful. That is simply not good enough.

Quite frankly, that touted multipurpose health service could have been a life changer for residents who currently have no choice but to make a three-hour round trip to Bundaberg or Gladstone for hospital care or specialist treatment. Residents in Agnes Water and Seventeen Seventy deserve access to health care just like everyone else. We are lucky to have two very hardworking local doctors who support a population of 6,000 people, which grows to 11,000 during peak times. It is no secret that those GPs rarely get any time off. We also know that for over 20 years there has been very little change to service delivery in that area and we cannot afford any more inaction on this issue. I will continue to fight for health infrastructure for the Discovery Coast. It is understood that a detailed service plan and infrastructure business case for Agnes Water is currently being prepared by the Wide Bay HHS. It is vital that that plan reflects the needs of the community.

Again, as I have done for many years, I go on the record to call for a neighbourhood centre for the Agnes Water community. It will not be forgotten about. The state budget has outlined \$39 million over three years to upgrade and construct neighbourhood centres, but again there is no mention of Agnes Water. For years we have been fighting for a dedicated centre in the region. I am determined to work with the Minister for Communities and the Minister for Housing to see this project become a reality.

Neighbourhood centres are a universal and vital point of access for community members. The centres are essential local infrastructure that provide hubs that are accessed by a wide cross-section of the community, including people who are marginalised and those who have significant needs. Often they are referred to as the 'brain bank' of local knowledge and are a real focal point for the community. The Discovery Coast Community Support Service has been operating out of a tiny three-metre by three-metre office space for years. With the local population continuing to grow, the cost of living at an all-time high and the housing crisis getting worse, the lack of support for the centre is simply not good enough. I call on the minister to help the Discovery Coast find a purpose-built neighbourhood centre as a matter of urgency.

The budget provides for a reduction in the learner driver fees. Again I acknowledge the work of Carmen McEneaney and our local campaign and petitions.

I want to say on the record that the Walkers Point boat ramp is still not funded despite promises having been made. For many years it has been named the No. 1 priority project in Queensland but still cannot get the funding it needs.

I thank all of the strong advocates for water safety and, in particular, acknowledge the FairPlay vouchers making swimming lessons more accessible. It was great to have the minister acknowledge in question time the work we did in progressing that important public policy outcome. We first raised the issue with the minister earlier in the year and, of course, on 28 May the government announced the SwimStart vouchers.

I will continue to work for projects for the region that have again been neglected, including: Moore Park Beach flood mitigation; the Bundaberg to Bargara bike path and the widening of Bargara Road; the funding commitment for sporting structure in Bargara; a feasibility study for a future Bargara state high school; and the Bargara Road and Hughes Road intersection upgrade. That is a terribly dangerous road and we seem to write a letter about it every couple of months. It would be an easy fix, but we need a commitment to and some respect for that project.

Other projects I will continue to fight for include: Round Hill Creek maintenance; Moneys Creek Lagoon rehabilitation; and a falls prevention program at the Bundaberg Hospital. I will take a moment to refer to recent correspondence from the department. While that is in Hervey Bay, fall prevention programs are the No. 1 strategy but they do not run in Bundaberg. I again put that on the program. I want to make sure that it becomes part of the future agenda.

There is a lack of social and affordable housing in our region. When you drive into Bundy or out into the region, it is terrible to see the caravans and tents on the side of the road. We have to do so much more in that space.

There has to be reinstatement of driver reviver funding. I acknowledge the members for Southern Downs and Callide whose electorates have suffered badly from what seems to be a petty cut to construction activity that we need to get back on the agenda. There needs to be upgrades of slipways and overtaking lanes on the Isis Highway and Rosedale Road. These are seriously unsafe roads where upgrades need to be considered.

Many have concerns with the budget, including economists who have warned that the budget will likely add to inflation because of the government's decision to inject more moneys from coal royalties into programs instead of being fiscally responsible. That is something that has been talked about many times tonight. These rivers of gold will not happen often and we have to do better with making sure we deal with issues such as paying down debt.

Overall, there is funding for some local issues that we applaud. The kindy program has been well received. There are concerns out there, as raised in question time this week, about staffing and the capacity of these institutions. Staff in my office have been on the phones hearing of concerns out there about the lack of consultation. It is a good initiative. We will make sure going forward that all the children in our regions benefit from early access to kindy.