




Speech By
Ann Leahy

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

Record of Proceedings, 21 August 2024

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL
APPROPRIATION BILL
Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)
Appropriation Bill

Housing, Big Build and Manufacturing Committee, Report

 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (2.25 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on 2024-25 budget estimates report No. 18 of the Housing, Big Build and Manufacturing Committee. I am really disappointed with this budget. It does not address the crises that we see in this state, the crises that people are facing: the cost-of-living crisis; the health crisis; the crime crisis; the youth crime crisis, which we see playing out in regional communities like Goondiwindi; and the housing crisis, which I see on a very regular basis—and the member for Everton alluded to what we are dealing with and the people who are coming through our doors. These challenges will not go away on their own. Sadly, after nearly a decade in office and the end of a four-year parliamentary term, this government has not provided reassurance that its policies are meeting the significant challenges in the health, crime, housing and cost-of-living areas. The bandaid solutions and the cost-shifting to other sectors outlined in the budget failed to address the underlying causes behind these challenges.

The budget provided a chance for the government to chart a new direction, however they missed that opportunity. The estimates process revealed just how unprepared the government is to meet the responsibilities of Queenslanders and also the responsibilities that local governments share in Queensland. I was hoping the new Minister for Local Government would bring a new focus and energy to help local governments in the state, but the estimates process showed quickly that nothing had changed. By the end of the local government session it was evident the sector was still not a priority for the Labor government. It was disappointing that the minister was not across the detail and left an impression she was not taking seriously local government matters.

The minister did not know how much the Labor government's mismanagement of fire ants is costing local governments. Queensland local governments have been cost shifted onto again by the state government. Fire ant control is reported to be costing some councils millions of dollars. Councils will need to take care of every park, nature reserve, road corridor and facility they manage to ensure that every space is investigated and any fire ants located are treated to prevent their spread. Queensland local governments are not eligible to claim against the National Fire Ant Eradication Program for additional costs they incur.

Councils have been told that as of 1 July 2024 they would be responsible for undertaking increased surveillance and suppression activities on fire ants. The Labor government is cost-shifting this onto local government and yet the local government minister was unaware of the costs to even her own council and in her own electorate. The minister was not able to give a long-term funding commitment to Works for Queensland, which is the No. 1 ask of Queensland councils, nor was she able

to explain why the program's guidelines had been changed to require shovel-ready projects. I do have a theory though that the manipulation of Works for Queensland has a lot to do with ribbon cutting by the state Labor government in the lead-up to the state election.

Most alarmingly, the minister could not explain why the government plunged many Queensland councils into deficit last financial year due to the delayed financial assistance grants payments. Paying the financial assistance grants is the responsibility of the state government. Financial sustainability is the No. 1 pressure facing many councils and this minister seemed lost in her own superdepartment without any focus on the issues that councils face on a day-to-day basis.

I am told that there were councils that questioned if they could run their final end-of-year pay run on 28 June because of the payment delay of the FA grants. The FA grants are a sizeable sum of money and I ask the minister: in relation to the interest that would have been earned on those funds that sat in the state government account, will that interest be shared with Queensland local governments, because, rightly, that is actually their interest and their funds? I would be very interested to know whether that interest will be forthcoming to Queensland local governments. It is only the LNP that will make local government a priority again as opposed to Labor, which has lost focus on local government in a superdepartment. We should show Labor the door in '24.