




Speech By  
**Brent Mickelberg**

**MEMBER FOR BUDERIM**

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**CHEAPER POWER (SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION BILL)**

 **Mr MICKELBERG** (Buderim—LNP) (6.12 pm): I rise to address the Cheaper Power (Supplementary Appropriation) Bill. After the Treasurer's contribution, we have heard it all. If ever I have heard a contribution that was about softening up Queenslanders for a coming ratings downgrade, it was the Treasurer's contribution to this bill. It is all about taking out the rubbish. It is all about softening people up: 'We'll wear the hurt so you don't wear the hurt in your budget.' The reality is that this government cannot manage the economy, cannot manage the budget and, as a consequence, Queenslanders are paying the price.

The temperature is dropping. This morning, I put on a jumper for the first time. Winter is coming and right now too many Queenslanders are struggling. Single parents and pensioners are sitting in their dark homes because it costs too much money to turn on the lights. People like those the health minister just mentioned are doing it tough because it costs too much to turn on the lights, it costs too much to turn on a heater and they are battling. We acknowledge that. All members of this House acknowledge that Queenslanders are doing it tough. The cost-of-living crisis is hurting Queenslanders and those scenarios are a reality for many people, not just in Waterford and Brisbane but right across the state, including on the Sunshine Coast. The LNP and every single member who has stood to address this bill has said from the outset that we will not stand in the way of cost-of-living relief for Queenslanders, but these rebates are not the answer to addressing the issues that are fundamentally causing that cost-of-living crisis.

The rebate that this bill seeks to establish will help because every little bit helps when bills start piling up, but it will only go so far. The cost of electricity in Queensland has increased by 19.9 per cent, which is the highest in the country. That is not something that Queensland should be proud of. In fact, the Labor government should be ashamed of that result. The cost of electricity is one of the top issues that I hear about when I am talking to members of my community, along with the health and crime crises, of course.

During summer, residents in my community in Palmview and Sippy Downs had to live with brownouts, which were even more frustrating. Never mind the fact that they are paying through the nose for electricity; they could not even turn on the light switch and get power because this government cannot manage an electricity grid. All the rebates in the world are not going to help if you cannot turn on the lights. Labor have got Queenslanders into this mess and Queenslanders need to be very clear that this crisis is of Labor's making. When Callide went offline nearly three years ago, Labor set Queenslanders on a path to higher electricity prices. Incredibly, the Labor government is taking the line that it has not yet seen the report into what happened at Callide and why it is not yet up and running. Three years on and still they do not know what happened at a power plant that they own half of. If that is the case, then potentially Queensland and the state government have even bigger problems than we might have expected on first glance.

Despite the fact that the Labor state government do not know what happened at Callide, they now want to buy back the half share of Callide that they flogged off many years ago. We have no information with respect to how much that will cost. How much extra will Queenslanders have to pay to buy back the Callide Power Station that was privatised by Labor? Despite the hollow rhetoric that we often hear from those opposite, the reality is that only Labor have sold assets in Queensland. In fact, Labor have sold billions of dollars worth of public assets. Queensland Motorways, Abbot Point, QR National, Port of Brisbane, forestry plantations, Brisbane Airport, Golden Casket, SunGas, Sun Retail and Allgas were all sold by Labor. The Treasurer has the hide to come in here and accuse the LNP of having an agenda to sell off assets. That is complete and utter rubbish. Queenslanders deserve better from this current Labor state government than those pathetic games and scare campaigns.

Every second of the day that Callide is not up and running costs Queenslanders money. Fixing Callide should be the priority in this cost-of-living crisis. It will bring more supply into the electricity market and drive down power prices. That is not my view; that is the view of energy experts. The fact that it is still offline is a total failure by this government and no amount of rebate will change that.

While those opposite are focused on bandaid solutions that will offer them a good headline on the nightly news or in the paper the next day, my LNP colleagues and I are focused on real solutions. We have said that we will implement a maintenance guarantee on all of the state owned power generators to prevent the Callide disaster from ever happening again. If our power plants were properly maintained then we would not need to bail out Queenslanders because they cannot afford to turn on the lights. Under the LNP, electricity will be more affordable for families, pensioners and small businesses because we will actually maintain our electricity assets, unlike the current Labor state government.

While families are struggling to keep the lights on right across Queensland, let's also spare a thought for the small and family businesses that are barely keeping their heads above water. I was in Bundaberg last week and I can tell you that businesses—

**A government member:** So were we.

**Mr MICKELBERG:** I know that the entire cabinet was in Bundaberg—blew in, blew out; flew in late, flew out early. I was there for a little bit longer and I met with some small businesses. A local real estate agent told me his power bill has increased from \$700 a quarter to \$700 a month. A small business owner has had his power bill double to a whopping \$8,000 a month. Another business owner is now paying \$12,000 a month for electricity, which is more than twice what it was two years ago even though they are using less. I note that months ago the Chamber of Commerce wrote to the Premier raising their concerns. I acknowledge that the Leader of the House did meet with the chamber last week but it took an awfully long time, I have to say. Those businesses still have not had any response to address their concerns. A rebate of \$325 is not going to save a small business when they are facing those sorts of price rises.

The doubling or even tripling of power bills means small businesses need to decide what they will cut and what they will save. Small businesses are closing their doors and Queenslanders are losing their jobs because they are not coping right now. That is the truth. Queensland's small and family businesses employ about a million people. A million people have a job because of a small business. A million people can put food on the table and pay for schoolbooks because of small businesses. They must be at the forefront of every single government's decision-making process but, unfortunately, under this Labor state government, they are always an afterthought. Small business deserve a voice at the table and they deserve to be front and centre of every government's decision-making.

The cost of running a business has become far too high, and it is one of the many reasons there are so many empty shopfronts not only here in the city but right across Queensland in our regional and rural communities. Queensland has the highest number of business liquidations in Australia because bills are becoming too much. I will say it again: the LNP will not stand in the way of cost-of-living relief in any form, but a \$325 rebate for eligible small businesses would hardly cover the cost of running a shop's power for a day.

I know those opposite will say, 'What about the Albanese government's \$325 too?' All right, let us double it to \$650, but it is still a drop in the ocean for a small business paying \$12,000 a month for electricity. The Bundaberg Chamber of Commerce president said to the media last week that \$325 for a small business is an insult. They are his words, not mine. He said that \$325 for a small business is an insult, and I am sure he said the same thing to the Leader of the House when he met with him last week.

It is a disgrace to hear from whistleblowers that chronic maintenance underfunding caused Callide to explode. It is a miracle that no-one was hurt but we simply cannot afford for it to happen again. Our maintenance guarantee will ensure it does not happen and we will be focused on driving

down the cost of living for every Queenslander. Along with having functioning power plants—which is a good start—we will offer \$3,500 grants to subsidise solar panels on rental properties which will save renters up to \$700 on their power bills. That is how you deliver affordable, reliable and sustainable electricity—not with power plant explosions and bandaid solutions.

This bill is evidence that Labor will say and do anything to cling to power. Labor will say and do anything to buy a vote because they cannot and they will not deal with the cause of the problems that they now want to bandaid over. If we needed any more evidence, check out the Premier's brief contribution to this debate—no substance, no solutions, just political rhetoric. It is only the LNP that is listening to Queenslanders, and it is only the LNP that has the right priorities for Queensland's future. For the member for Gladstone, that is why Queenslanders need to show Labor the door in '24.