



Speech By
Dr Christian Rowan


MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

Record of Proceedings, 21 August 2024

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL
APPROPRIATION BILL**

**Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)
Appropriation Bill**

Community Support and Services Committee, Report

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (3.16 pm): As the Liberal National Party's shadow minister for the arts, I rise to address the Appropriation Bill for 2024-25 and specifically the proposed expenditure of the Labor state government as examined by the Queensland parliament's Community Support and Services Committee.

During the specific examination of expenditure for the arts, questions were again raised in relation to the new theatre being constructed at the Queensland Performing Arts Centre. The Labor state government's overall management of the planning and delivery of this new theatre has been extremely problematic.

Under the Labor government, this new theatre had an original total project cost of \$150 million and an original opening date of 2022. This then became \$175 million and an opening date of mid-2024. Now it has been uncovered that the new theatre will not open for audiences until at least 2026, with a new total project cost of \$184 million following a \$9 million cost blowout as reported in this year's state budget. Notwithstanding issues related to the 2022 floods, of which revised opening dates had been committed to and since missed, the fact remains that the Labor state government has repeatedly failed to properly manage this project on time and on budget.

We are at a unique time in Queensland's history as we progress towards the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games, and we do not have a moment to lose. The world's attention and focus is already turning towards Queensland. Between now and 2032, we must maximise and seize every opportunity that is possible to further enhance and showcase Queensland's tremendous reputation as a destination for excellence in the performing, visual and creative arts sectors.

During this year's estimates, questions were also asked in relation to the \$126,000 ministerial study tour to the United States of America and Canada by the Minister for the Arts as well as by the director-general and other staff. Such extravagance, including thousands of dollars on chauffeur-driven vehicles and luxury accommodation, has drawn considerable concern from Queenslanders who are continuing to struggle through Labor's cost-of-living crisis.

It has also been noted that it was extraordinary that throughout the entire overseas trip not once did the minister issue a press release or even post on social media to let Queenslanders know of the overseas business that the minister was undertaking. During these estimates, questions were raised particularly in relation to the specific selection of the Fairmont Hotel at Edmonton, described as 'Edmonton's most luxurious hotel'. This was despite there being much more reasonably priced accommodation available just 800 metres down the road.

I note that, when the minister was specifically asked who made the determination to stay at the Fairmont Hotel and why, the minister stated the selection of this specific accommodation came on the recommendation of 'in-market representatives'. There was no confirmation as to who specifically made this determination or approved the selection of this hotel.

During this estimates hearing questions were also raised in relation to the budgeted allocation for the repatriation of First Nations remains by the Queensland Museum and the additional hiring of staff. It was confirmed by the CEO of the Queensland Museum that of the 1,394 ancestral remains and other objects to be repatriated approximately 890 items are ancestral remains, with the other items being secret and sacred objects. Of the ancestral remains, 67 have been identified as belonging to the Pacific Islands and nations, including Borneo and Fiji.

When questions as to whether the \$4.6 million allocation in the 2023-24 state budget for a period of five years would be sufficient to complete the full repatriation of all items and remains, the minister indicated that the process may take a lot longer due to the sensitive processes required as part of a diligent repatriation program. I certainly accept the explanation as provided by the minister. First Nations communities in Queensland, Australia and overseas deserve to have their remains repatriated as efficiently, sensitively and transparently as possible.

Finally, I wish to thank all members of the committee, the chair, the deputy chair and the minister for their attendance on the day as well as other departmental, agency and other representatives. I thank all members of the committee and the secretariat for their work in compiling this report. This is an important part of openness and transparency when it comes to democracy in Queensland. The committee on the day did some diligent work, and I also acknowledge the attendance of all of those staff on the day.