




Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

Record of Proceedings, 12 June 2024

MOTION

Far North Queensland, Infrastructure

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (5.29 pm): I rise to support the motion moved by my colleague the member for Chatsworth. If ever you were looking for an issue that epitomises what this Labor government is all about, you need look no further than the Barron River bridge. It is full of cracks, operating at reduced capacity, costs a fortune and is long overdue for replacement. What did the *Cairns Post* have to say yesterday about the state government's paltry contribution to the Barron River bridge? They said it was 'nowhere near enough to stave off a major handbrake to the region's economy'. It cited the member for Barron River as saying he would be 'pretty annoyed' if there was no commitment. Well, 'pretty annoyed' is no comfort to all of those residents, workers, business owners and tourists who travel up and down that range each and every day.

Talking about handbrakes, there is no bigger handbrake than the member for Barron River. He has been the handbrake from day one when it comes to replacing this particular bridge. It is a fact that the locals have been raising concerns about this bridge since the mid-1990s. When I was living up there for a couple of years I used to drive back and forth over that bridge. It has not changed since then, and that was 30-odd years ago. The local news service TropicNow said—

Repeated recommendations to repair corroding parts of the Barron River Bridge at Kuranda have been ignored since 2015.

That was the same year the current member for Barron River was elected. Further reports in 2017, 2018 and 2020 referred to the same issues and found that remedial actions recommended in 2015 had not been carried out, despite the report recommending they be completed within two years.

Where are we today? A decade since those cracks were found, load limits apply, traffic is restricted to one lane and there are traffic controllers at the end of the bridge. What does it mean? In October last year the member for Barron River described the bridge as a 'lifeline of connectivity'. He described the situation as a hot-button issue for residents in Kuranda and Speewah and everyone who travels up to the Tablelands and back. That hot-button issue has become a rocket, and you do not have to be Einstein to work out where that rocket is heading.

What does the member for Barron River say about the lack of funding for the Barron River bridge replacement? He now blames the feds. That is right: he blames his Labor mates in Canberra for no funding being allocated for the Barron River bridge. Let's not forget that the member for Barron River was a minister in this government, which leads to the question: what did he say while he was sitting around that cabinet table? What did he do? Was he a lion or was he a mouse, because that bridge has not had any money spent on it? The impact of their inaction is the economic decimation, as we have heard from my colleagues, of small business, increased transport costs and tourism operators that are now on the brink.

While Labor remains focused on 50-cent bus fares for the south-east, road users on the Kennedy Highway are left sitting there waiting at a stop-go sign, and they will be waiting there for a long time to come. Maybe that is the strategy of the member for Cairns. When the bridge falls into the river, he is going to start up canoes for people to get back and forth across the river, because that is the pinch point of the Kennedy Highway. If that bridge goes there is no other way to get down there, and they need to understand that.

In terms of that 3.3 per cent of the total cost to replace the bridge in the budget yesterday, well, I reckon the people of Far North Queensland are worth more than 3.3 per cent. I reckon that if you went up into the Far North—up to Mareeba, Cooktown, Coen and all the places up the cape—and you asked them what they thought about it, they would tell you in pretty certain terms what it means. They have a right to demand answers and they have a right to demand action, because what has happened up there is not acceptable. The member for Barron River has clearly reached his use-by date and it is now time to show him the door in 2024.

(Time expired)