




Speech By  
**Dale Last**

**MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN**

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## **APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; REVENUE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL; STATE FINANCIAL INSTRUCTIONS AND METWAY MERGER AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (11.26 am): I rise to speak to the appropriation bills. Make no mistake: this was a four-month election budget, a big-spending budget to buy votes. Queenslanders will not be fooled because a leopard does not change its spots. During his budget speech, the Treasurer begged Queenslanders to make a choice about their future, not the past, and declare that the budget makes the values of this government clear. What this budget does is prove that this government does not value regional Queensland in any way other than as a cash cow. Despite the claims from the Treasurer and his hand-picked Labor candidate, the same can be said of the Burdekin electorate. That is not an opinion; it is a cold, hard fact.

The government's own regional action plan showed a grand total investment of just over \$19.5 billion into the Burdekin electorate. Of that \$19.5 billion, more than \$3.7 million is funded from—and remember this—Jackie Trad's Resources Community Infrastructure Fund which is majority funded by the resource companies. This budget is so sparse for the Burdekin local government area that only two projects are shown on the government's interactive map, and one of those is ongoing work on the Burdekin River Bridge that is majority funded by the federal government. If we listen to the Treasurer and judge this budget on the future, it is the same disastrous outcome for the Burdekin electorate with only four projects that have not been previously announced or funded by Jackie Trad's fund.

Despite regular appearances in the RACQ's top 10 list of the most unroadworthy roads in Queensland, there is not one cent shown for road projects in the electorate, including in the Isaac Regional Council area, despite the then mayor and Labor candidate endorsing a motion expressing concern about the safety of roads in that area three years ago. When you drive around the Isaac region, in fact, when you drive around the Burdekin electorate, you will see some of the worst roads in Queensland. The highway is colloquially known as the Peak Downs goat track. There is no funding for the Bruce Highway. It is an absolute disgrace. For roads like the Southern Access Corridor road, south of Townsville, the extension into dual lanes from Vantassel Street to Elliot Springs, or the upgrade of the Bruce Highway between Killymoon Creek and the AIMS turn-off, there is no funding.

There are quite a few important projects for the Burdekin electorate that do not get a mention on the map or in the budget documents, but there is one project that features in the documents and strangely does not appear on the map. The capital statement shows \$4 million for remediation works associated with PFAS at the Ayr Fire & Rescue Station and, frankly, it is about time. After all, it is now over four years since this government was provided with the detailed site investigation report. Not only has PFAS had a huge impact on the staff and auxiliaries at the station since it was first detected six years ago; it is now of concern to the wider Ayr community. You have to ask: why has it taken four long years for the report to be made public? It is no wonder the project is not shown on the map. A new station is needed in Ayr and the minister is well aware of my advocacy in calling for that facility. I am also calling on the minister to provide assurances that, whilst that remediation work is underway, there

will be no negative impacts on the services that are provided by our local firms and that, when those remediation works are completed, they will no longer be subjected to restrictions that hinder their training.

Earlier I mentioned the figure of \$19.5 million. I will add another figure, \$13 billion, which is the income from royalties in the current financial year, the lion's share of which are earned in the Burdekin electorate. The total project shown in the Regional Action Plan is 0.15 per cent of that royalties figure. I will repeat that: 0.15 per cent. Somewhere between 60 per cent and 70 per cent of the royalties in this state come from my electorate and the best that this Treasurer can do is give us back a measly 0.15 per cent of those funds. The hypocrisy of this government when it comes to reinvestment in the regions is breathtaking. We make it and they take it. It is that simple. The hardworking residents, business owners and workers who live and work in the electorate are sick of it. They are sick of the false promises, the rubbish roads, the lack of teachers, nurses, doctors and police officers and they are sick of being taken for granted.

For quite some time now the Burdekin district has been campaigning for a CT scanner at the Ayr Hospital. We are talking about a \$3 million project that, if fully funded, would take our share of the royalties to 0.17 per cent. It is a slap in the face for the Burdekin community and I am not about to let this government sweep the issue under the carpet.

Moving down to Bowen we have the perfect example of this government's attitude towards regional Queensland. In last year's budget we were told that \$50 million had been committed to the Bowen Jetty. I am glad that the former transport minister is in the House today. He might remember that. At the time the former transport minister made that announcement, I said they should have made him pull out the chequebook and sign the cheque because, 12 months later, the budget shows a total of \$2 million out of a total of \$5 million for consultation, design and approvals. Again, is it any wonder the project is not on the map or in the glossy brochures? Of course, there is no money for the upgrade of the Bowen Marina, a project that has been on the books for years.

Moving west and to the roads, which can only be described as 'appalling', the map is just as bare. In Collinsville, the only project is lighting at the aerodrome. There is nothing for Nebo, Middlemount or Dysart where the community is calling for affordable housing and the police station is like something out of the 1970s. In Clermont, we have a contribution to the police station that has already been constructed, but nothing else. Then we head to Moranbah, the epicentre of Queensland's coalmining industry. We have heard this government spruik the new hospital at Moranbah many times. Of course, we are never going to say no to a new hospital, but what do we see in this new hospital? Would members believe that it is being built with the exact same number of beds as the old hospital? So much for servicing the current demand, let alone the future! To add salt to the wounds, we found out that when it is finished it will not have a permanent doctor. You could not make this up. Regardless of whether we judge this government based on their record or based on the so-called future offered by this budget, it is crystal clear that the government has given up on the Burdekin electorate.

I now move onto my shadow portfolios. It is somewhat ironic that, as the shadow minister for natural resources and mines, I see little difference with my analysis of the budget for the Burdekin electorate. I mentioned earlier the figure of \$13 billion, which is the amount that flowed to the government from royalties. In the past I have called royalty income 'a river of gold' and this week the *Courier-Mail* described it as 'the golden egg'. Whether it is a river or an egg, you would think you would at least show some love for it—but not in this budget. There is nothing in the budget to address mine safety concerns. There is nothing to address the hurdles standing in the way of the proponents of new projects, including critical minerals. There is nothing to address the investment risk that is stifling growth and job creation. There is nothing to implement the recommendations of the Queensland Resources Industry Development Plan, including the critical minerals hub, and there is nothing to help develop further gas supply, which would not only support the resources sector but also drive down energy costs for Queenslanders.

Let us compare this tired decade-old government's attitude to the resources sector with the reality. Queensland's natural resources, if harnessed correctly and managed appropriately, can drive future economic booms, fund important government services and support value-added industries like manufacturing. Queensland should be a world leader, a jurisdiction full of potential in both traditional resources and critical minerals that investors look to and a jurisdiction where worker safety is the No. 1 priority. This budget does nothing to achieve that vision.

In corrective services we are finally seeing action on overcrowding with the scheduled opening of the Lockyer Valley Correctional Centre and the beginning of works at the Townsville Correctional Centre. Frankly, it is about time and it cannot come soon enough. As we saw this week in a survey released in Townsville, there are huge problems with staffing. Morale is at an all-time low and there is

a disconnect between senior management and staff at the coalface. Working in a prison is a tough job and we need to support our prison officers. Whilst the LNP welcomes the capacity uplift program and the opening of the Lockyer Valley Correctional Centre to alleviate overcrowding and, therefore, improve safety for staff, there are questions surrounding what the capacity uplift program actually is and whether there will be sufficient staff to manage increased prisoner numbers. While the capital statement shows 'more than 900 operational staff' will be required at the new Lockyer Valley Correctional Centre, the Service Delivery Statement shows only an additional 587 staff across the entire department.

Queenslanders appreciate the people who respond in their time of need, regardless of the uniform they wear and whether they are paid or volunteers. The Queensland Fire Department's first budget heralds change—some welcome and some not so welcome, depending on whose opinion you trust. The transition of the Rural Fire Service into the Queensland Fire Department was announced with much fanfare by this government in September of last year with a commitment to a \$1 million Rural Fire Service Innovation Fund and an extra 114 additional positions for the Rural Fire Service. Again, this budget has failed to deliver. Despite the then minister's assurances in a media release, there is no mention of the Rural Fire Service Innovation Fund within the budget, no funding to assist with the transition of the Rural Fire Service and the total number of departmental staff is actually decreasing.

The LNP opposition supports the provision of new appliances and equipment to both Queensland Fire and Rescue Services and the Rural Fire Service, but I place on record the delays that we have seen previously in the replacement of Rural Fire Service appliances and issues where appliances had to be customised to fit in the fire station. There is still a lot of work that needs to be done in that space. Whilst we have commitments in the budget to continue work and start work on new stations, it is clear that this government has given up on new stations in Hervey Bay and South Townsville as both projects are notably absent from the budget documents. I ask the minister to clarify that the commitment to upgrade Rural Fire Brigade stations is in addition to the \$1 million recurrent funding to upgrade Rural Fire Service facilities. That is the same funding that was to address the lack of electricity, running water and toilets in many stations.

This week's Queensland Audit Office report titled *Queensland's regions 2023* states that three-quarters of all Queenslanders live in the regions. That is more than the combined population of Western Australia, Tasmania and the ACT. While the QAO's definition of 'regional Queensland' may differ from mine, it is clear that regional Queensland makes a huge contribution to this state's prosperity. Regardless of whether I look at the Burdekin electorate, rural and regional Queensland or the departments within my shadow portfolio, it is clear that this budget has one aim: to bring about the re-election of a Labor government. Following the release of the budget, I explained to the media that a 50-cent public transport fare does nothing for a patient at the Ayr Hospital who faces a five-hour round trip for a potentially life-saving CT scan, nor does a 50-cent public transport fare make the Peak Downs Highway safer or prevent a family car from being damaged while driving on unsealed roads throughout the electorate.

Queenslanders are looking for hope. They are looking for a better future. They want something done about crime, health, housing and cost of living. Whilst this budget was aimed at easing cost-of-living pressures, it is abundantly clear that the disparity in funding across the state was all about one thing: saving this tired, decade-old government from annihilation at the next election. That is right: it was about the members of this government protecting and sandbagging their own jobs.

I believe in my electorate. I believe in value to people who live and work in the towns, on the land and in the mines, people who have aspirations to do better. I will not give up on them like this Labor government. I will spend every single day between now and the election continuing to fight for our fair share of the pie, continuing to fight for the infrastructure and the services that we deserve and continuing to fight for rural and regional Queensland.

The Burdekin electorate deserves better than what it got out of this budget. The Burdekin electorate—the powerhouse of this state and the electorate that pumps billions of dollars into the state government coffers—deserves to have some of that pie come back into the electorate. It is time at the next election for the people of this state to make a clear choice. They can continue with the same old, tired government or they can vote for a government that will truly represent and deliver for rural and regional Queensland.