




Speech By  
**James Lister**

**MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS**

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Record of Proceedings, 21 May 2024

**CHEAPER POWER (SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION BILL)**

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (10.01 pm): I rise to make a contribution on the Cheaper Power (Supplementary Appropriation) Bill. As my colleagues in the LNP opposition have said, we will be supporting this bill. I acknowledge the need for cost-of-living support for people in my electorate of Southern Downs. I know many speakers before me on both sides of the House have spoken about the challenges that people are facing in terms of making ends meet. We all know that households are experiencing greater fuel costs, rent is up, as are interest rates, and groceries are more expensive. In country areas it is more so. We have to transport our groceries and our goods further, our services are more expensive, and that compounds the high expense of fuel. Along with childcare costs and education, the family income has been under pressure. That is something that I appreciate. People raise it with me and people in small business raise it with me when they talk about reduced demand and tough times for them as people with less money in their pocket are unable to spend as much as they would. I know that people will be pleased to receive the money that they will get.

I also acknowledge that there will be some support for small businesses. One of the difficulties for businesses in my electorate of Southern Downs is that they experience all of the extra costs that families and households do such as high electricity costs, high fuel costs, the cost of transportation and so forth. There is a baker in my electorate who has been experiencing very intermittent power supply. When you are a baker and you get up at 2 am to bake your pies, pastries and bread you need uninterrupted electricity. He invested in a 100 KVA generator for his bakery business at a cost of \$30,000. With the price of diesel as it is and the price of electricity as it is, it is much for muchness whether he runs his business on a diesel generator or off the electricity supply. I think that crystallises the difficulty that businesses are facing.

The member for Kawana made the point that these rebates may make electricity appear cheaper. With the quantities that are used by businesses such as farming operations and bakeries in my electorate the state simply would not be able to give rebates sufficient to compensate them for the extreme rise in electricity prices in recent years. If running a generator on diesel to run your business gets to be the same cost as running it off the electricity grid there really has to be something wrong.

Another difficulty in terms of cost for small and large businesses in my electorate is water. I am sorry to say that a very important business in my electorate of Southern Downs, Sweets Strawberry Runners, who produce a third of the strawberry runners for the strawberry industry in Australia—an incredibly important business—is closing down due to a combination of the high cost and unavailability of water—it is a business that would have been saved by the advent of Emu Swamp Dam—and the cost of electricity that they pay for refrigeration. That is a business that employed hundreds of people. I have been there and seen hundreds of people working on the strawberry runners in the paddocks. Because of the high costs that we are experiencing, that business is no more; those jobs are no more; and Australia has less food security as a result. If the cost of power rises we have seen in recent times was taken away—which cannot be compensated for by rebates in the amounts we are talking about with commercial use—that business would still be able to trade. We are losing a sawmiller in my

electorate. I will be discussing this with my honourable friend the member for Condamine. The costs simply got too high: an environmental levy, the cost of electricity and the cost of transportation and diesel.

I understand that many people in my electorate of Southern Downs are doing it very tough. People are struggling to make ends meet with the family budget. People are struggling to pay their rent. Businesses are struggling to make enough to keep their staff on to pay their bills. It is a fact that parts of Southern Downs have some of the worst rental vacancies and rent rises in the state of Queensland. In the case of Warwick, that is largely, in my view, as a result of the MacIntyre Wind Farm project which has seen a flow of many workers into Warwick. Unfortunately, many people who have rented for many years without problem have been displaced and are now homeless.

I appreciate the difficulties my electorate faces. I am supporting this bill and the relief that it will provide to people who are struggling to pay their electricity bills and their household costs, but I say to the government that there needs to be a broader look at why electricity prices have risen so much—almost 20 per cent last year; which is three times the national average. There are not too many businesses that employ lots of people in my electorate who are celebrating the electricity landscape that they are facing at the moment.