




Speech By  
**James Lister**

**MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS**

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

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (8.56 pm): I rise to make my contribution to the budget bills for this year. Like most members on this side of the House, I have very little to praise but I will start with the one glimmer I want to thank the government for, and that is the announcement of the Cross Border Commissioner. This is something I have taken as a commitment to both the 2017 and the 2020 state elections, and it was my intention to do so again at the upcoming state election. The reason is that this is an extremely important facility for the communities that I represent along the Queensland-New South Wales border, like Stanthorpe, Warwick and Goondiwindi and the smaller places in between like Texas and Wallangarra.

Living on the border is not easy when you have to face the red tape, the restrictions and the difficulties in doing business on either side. We found that to be most acute during the COVID lockdowns and the border closures. It would have been fantastic to have the Cross Border Commissioner available for us then. I know that I speak for the Goondiwindi Regional Council in saying that. I have not yet spoken to the mayor of the Southern Downs region, but I bet a penny to a pound that she and the council will be pleased about that announcement. I want to thank Minister Butcher for that.

The only thing I would say is that I think the Cross Border Commissioner ought to be located in the Premier's department and not in the Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water. It needs to be positioned so that they can bring departments together and insist, with the imprimatur of the Premier and the director-general of the Premier's department, on cooperation and understanding of the unique difficulties of living on the border. I have put together a list of the kinds of things that people talk to me about as cross-border issues: youth crime; transport; red tape; schooling; health services; infrastructure; disaster preparedness and recovery—and I know the Goondiwindi Regional Council needs help to make sure the communities on the southern side of the border have an integrated plan with them for disaster preparedness; firearms regulation; biosecurity; business certification; licensing and registration for small businesses, which is a big issue; and Murray-Darling Basin Agreement implementation. That is a good initiative and I thank the minister for it.

However, that is the end of the bright part of this budget from my perspective. I want to talk about the housing situation. In my electorate of Southern Downs, housing availability is in a dire state. It is my understanding that my electorate has the worst vacancies in the state. That does not surprise me because I have people coming to see me saying, 'I'm homeless. I've rented for 20 years. I have a job but I don't have a home.' That is really difficult to see.

I want to applaud the opposition leader, David Crisafulli, for his budget reply speech in which he outlined a vision to improve the supply of housing. It is not talk. It is not announcing again and again what you are doing and putting elaborate and glitzy stuff on social media. It is about actually making a difference and getting more homes built. That is how you improve the housing situation—more new homes, not just the churn of buying existing ones and turning them into social housing.

The LNP will abolish stamp duty for first home buyers of a new property or one they have built, for properties valued below \$700,000. That is a great way to improve the supply of housing, to encourage the construction of new housing. There will be billions of dollars to assist in providing the infrastructure necessary to be able to open up the blocks to enable homes to be built. I know that that will be of enormous comfort to councils, many of which do not have the means to embark on the development necessary. They yearn to have support from the state government to provide the infrastructure for sewerage, water, electricity, roads, parks and so forth. There is another example of something which is aimed unashamedly at increasing the supply of housing.

One thing that is dear to my heart is partnering with the community and not-for-profit sector. I think I have mentioned to the House before that I know there are not-for-profits and community organisations in my electorate of Southern Downs that would love the opportunity to partner with the Queensland government to provide housing. They know the need. They understand it exactly—it is their people—and they are very good at doing what they do very economically, indeed.

I took the chair of Killarney Memorial Aged Care, a fantastic organisation, to meet with the department some years ago. I am thankful that the minister allows us to do that. At the end of the day, Killarney Memorial Aged Care had land and they had a design; they just needed to sit down with the department and work out the nuts and bolts, but it went nowhere. I hear other stories about the Catholic Church making land available to the state government, but nothing has come of it. You have to wonder whether there is an ideological objection to the community of the not-for-profit sector providing housing, because I cannot find any other explanation.

**Mr Power** interjected.

**Mr LISTER:** I am not taking interjections from the member for Logan, Madam Deputy Speaker.

**Mr Power** interjected.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Ms Lui): Member for Logan, cease your interjections.

**Mr LISTER:** In the absence of some sort of logical explanation as to why a good proposal goes nowhere, you are left to consider that the government just says, 'No, only big bureaucracies can provide housing.' That is not true, and we will do something about that.

We saw at the first housing round table that the ALP promised to provide the student accommodation at Griffith University as social housing. What a debacle that was—\$2 million down the drain and, again, lots of announcements but no follow-through. Three years ago the \$2 billion Housing Investment Fund was announced. At the second round table, in October 2022, it was increased to \$2 billion. Three years after the commencement of that scheme, not a single house has been built. These are appalling statistics. The Labor government should hang their heads in shame at having not built a single home. However, I know that they put a lot of announcements on social media. I saw the minister and others in their hard hats and wearing high-vis and lots of colour and movement in the hope that they would convince people they were doing something.

**Mr Stevens:** The hard hats are to stop the cricket bats hitting their heads.

**Mr LISTER:** The hard hats would stop the cricket bats. There might be a few people with cricket bats waiting for the next election, I suspect. But we cannot have a decade of failure in housing go uncriticised. There are people in my electorate who need housing. There are employers in my electorate who need staff, but people cannot work for them because they do not have housing. These are problems that have been caused by a decade of poor policy by the Labor government.

I want to talk about the issue of transport in my electorate. There are a couple of things in this budget that disappoint me. I see that QTRIP still shows that we are still billions behind in routine program maintenance. I see the shadow transport minister—

**Mr Minnikin:** The backlog, mate.

**Mr LISTER:** Backlog, yes. That may not mean much to somebody living in a metropolitan area, but when you have to drive long distances on the Gore Highway, the Cunningham Highway, the Barwon Highway or the New England Highway and you are driving over rough surfaces, it is dangerous, it wears your car out and slows things down. That is a point very important to heavy vehicle operators who rely on those roads and whose trucks are constantly busted. In fact, one heavy vehicle operator challenged me to come with him on a trip down the Gore Highway to see how bad it was. I was looking forward to doing that, but he had to cancel because he broke a front axle on a pothole near the Warrego Creek crossing. That is a massive brake on the good private sector which has to try to make a quid and provide transport services for our economy. We really need to do something about that.

**Mr Stevens:** Emu Swamp Dam.

**Mr LISTER:** Emu Swap Dam—I will get to that, member for Mermaid Beach. In relation to speed cameras, I see that the budget predicts a \$118 million increase in speeding fines. The community of Millmerran was in uproar some months ago when a speed camera was located just outside of town. Many disputed that it was calibrated properly. People were finding themselves fined twice, three times or four times in a day. They found out about it and they had thousands and thousands of dollars worth of fines and lost their licences. If the Labor government want to resort to pious expressions, 'Oh, this is all about safety,' I ask them: why did they embark on the miserable decision to close and demolish the Gladfield Driver Reviver? I remember seeing them play the village idiot rather than admit that all they wanted to do was—

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order, members.

**Mr LISTER:** They said, 'Oh, no, no-one uses it.' We got 1,000 signatures in two weeks from people turning up. The government said, 'No, there aren't enough volunteers. The volunteers were agents,' and so forth. That was news to the volunteers, who were bitterly upset that it was closed because they enjoyed providing that service. I maintain that the Gladfield Driver Reviver was the best driver reviver in the state. Not only did they evict them and refuse to listen to the petition, refuse to listen to reason, but, faster than a ferret up a trouser leg, the department went in and demolished the building. They wanted to make sure there could be no turning back; that driver reviver was going to go. They doubled down. This is the hypocrisy we see from the Labor government.

Lastly, on the matter of transport, I mention the Wallangarra railway line. At the end of last year a fire went through there and four bridges, plus a traffic bridge, were burnt. The traffic bridge has been repaired, and I thank the department for that, but there are four other small bridges—I am talking about bridges not much longer than from me to you, Madam Deputy Speaker—that were two metres off the ground; they are just to allow water to go underneath. Queensland Rail says it will cost over \$18 million to repair them. What planet are they on? What are they smoking? Even if you were to build it to the exacting standards of Queensland Rail and hopefully build it more efficiently than they do—their workforce issues have been terrible in terms of replacing sleepers already on that line—it could not cost that much. It is ludicrous! It is cartoonistically absurd. I am calling on the government—and I have written to the transport minister about this—to get real about that and reopen the line. If it was good enough to have the line before and to put 6,000 sleepers down a few years later then it is good enough now and repair the fire damage. It is important to the tourism industry in my electorate.

On crime, a decade ago it was a high priority for Labor when they came to power, and they watered down the youth justice laws. Over the intervening years they have been dragged at length, kicking and screaming, to reintroduce some semblance of consequences for action, but they have always tried to do it in a way which says to their backers on the left, 'Don't worry, we are going to make sure we word it in a way that no-one actually goes to jail,' but then they go out and tell the community that they are the toughest laws in Australia. What nonsense!

I saw some statistics announced the other day that there is a 16 per cent reduction in youth crime. I think the reduction in youth crime depends on how it is measured. My understanding is that they measure the amount of youth crime by the number of offenders who have been charged. What if 50 cars were stolen and only one offender was charged, or maybe there were 10 charged last week and eight this week? Does that indicate that crime is getting better? No, it does not. The measure of crime is how many victims there are, and there are victims aplenty—and they will take a very harsh verdict on this government at the next election. I know that the Greens said we can never imprison our way to community safety. I can tell you, that would be news to the people of Goondiwindi who have to hide their keys each night, who have been invaded over and over again, because if somebody has been let out who should not have been let out and they invade your home, but they would not have invaded your home if they were locked up, there is the community safety aspect.

You would have real difficulty telling somebody who is a victim of crime that locking up the offender before they became a victim of crime would not have saved them. I invite anybody who disagrees with me to walk the streets of Goondiwindi and advance those ludicrous ideas. I asked a question on notice of the Minister for Police for statistics on rural crime in the area around Millmerran and Pampas because the Pampas community came to me about the growing amount of rural crime. The minister's response—30 days down the track—was that it would be an inappropriate use of police resources. It would use too many resources to answer your question. That is a discourtesy not only to this House but also to victims of crime around Pampas. While I am at it: where is the police sergeant at Millmerran Police Station? We hear all these happy statistics about people at the academy.

**An honourable member** interjected.

**Mr LISTER:** I can tell you, they are down to three days a week of counter hours so if you want to see the police it had better be on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday because Thursdays and Fridays there are only two senior constables who are stationed there temporarily to keep it going. I thank them for taking that job on to at least make sure we have some police.

**Mr O'Connor** interjected.

**Mr LISTER:** The member for Bonney just reminded me of something. I want to talk about water. Where is the money for Emu Swamp Dam? That is a project that will provide 700 jobs for my community. Here is a project that will provide water security for the people of Stanthorpe and water security for the farmers who grow our food, provide food security and pay taxes to pay for all of us lot in here. This is a bad budget, and I say to the people of the Southern Downs: the LNP will do better.