




Speech By
Patrick Weir

MEMBER FOR CONDAMINE

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CHEAPER POWER (SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION BILL)

 **Mr WEIR** (Condamine—LNP) (6.46 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Cheaper Power (Supplementary Appropriation) Bill 2024. According to the explanatory notes, the objective of the bill is to seek supplementary appropriation of \$2.267 billion for the 2023-24 financial year for unforeseen expenditure to provide funding for rebates applying to power bills to support cost-of-living relief for Queensland households. The bill allows for energy rebates of up to \$1,000 to be provided to an estimated 2.2 million Queensland households. The rebate is to be applied automatically to the electricity accounts of eligible residential customers and targeted as a lump sum credit from 1 July 2024.

The LNP will not be opposing this bill as we are all too aware of the cost-of-living pressures that families are under as a result of the failed policies of the Palaszczuk and now Miles governments. We have heard government members tell Queenslanders that they will deliver cheap, clean electricity, only to see prices rising at the fastest rate in the country. The fact that they now have to come into this House and pass a bill to access another \$2.267 billion to distribute this rebate is clear proof that this Miles government has lost control of electricity prices in this state. The only option that they can come up with is a cash splash even though most of the large generators in this state are state owned.

One thing we have to give this government credit for is that it never runs out of excuses for failure. We heard that power prices went up due to the war in Ukraine which led to increased coal prices. I have stated many times that this is nonsense as the government owned generators have long-term contracts with the mines that deliver that coal. A number of these mines operate solely to deliver coal to nearby power stations and are bound by long-term contracts. Neither Minister de Brenni nor Treasurer Dick would ever answer that question when asked or disclose what those contracts are.

On 13 May this year the Auditor-General appeared at a public hearing before the Clean Economy Jobs, Resources and Transport Committee regarding Audit Office report No. 5 of 2023-24 titled *Energy 2023*. In response to a question regarding coal price impacts on the cost of our generators, the Auditor-General stated that the generators were immune to the impact of rising coal prices as the coal price that they use is fixed. That is clear evidence that this Labor government has been misleading Queenslanders over the increase in their electricity costs.

Contributing to the increase in electricity prices has been the debacle we have witnessed at Callide. This week marks three years since the explosion at Callide C4 and that generator has been offline ever since. The water cooling tower at C3 also collapsed, taking it offline for an extended period. Generators B1 and B2 were not immune as both went offline for a period during that time. At one stage at Callide, all four generators were offline at the same time. That is mismanagement and incompetence on a grand scale. I doubt there is another energy minister who would be able to match that record: all four generators off at once. I am even willing to go out on a limb and predict that he would be the only minister in the world who could claim such a record. It is absolutely unbelievable.

The minister has claimed that this outage has not impacted power prices, but both the Auditor-General and the Queensland Competition Authority have declared the prices have been impacted by these outages. We still do not know what happened at C4. Soon after the event, Dr Sean Brady was appointed to write an independent report, which will be publicly released, on the cause of this event. We are still waiting to see that report. What do they have to hide? Indeed, the failure to release the report is now the subject of Federal Court action. Despite never-ending promises, this government seems to have no ability to reduce electricity prices apart from cash handouts. The government repeatedly state that their renewable plan will deliver cheaper electricity but it is only the most ardent Labor supporter who would continue to believe this.

At the public hearing I mentioned earlier, the Auditor-General cast serious doubt on the capacity of this Miles government to deliver on its Energy and Jobs Plan in the timeframe and with the costs as promised. The Auditor expressed concern as to the financial viability of large-scale projects, particularly the two large pumped hydro projects. Neither of those projects has a business case that is publicly available, there are no approvals and there are no environmental approvals, state or federal, so how could anyone believe that this will do anything except drive up power prices? According to government figures, it has been estimated that Borumba hydro will cost \$14 billion and Pioneer-Burdekin will cost \$12 billion. There is no way this Labor government will deliver either of those projects for anywhere near those prices given their record for blowouts or in the timeframe promised. Indeed, there are predictions that Pioneer-Burdekin will not come in at less than \$20 billion.

Queenslanders are struggling with the cost of living and any help will be welcome, but more needs to be done to address the underlying causes of it. This government is currently holding an inquiry into supermarket prices but have excluded any of the issues that the government has direct control over as they do not want Queenslanders to know how much government failures have contributed to the cost-of-living crisis. As I stated, the \$1,000 will be welcome, but a cash splash just before a state election will be seen by most as being more about political survival than genuine concern over the struggles of everyday Queenslanders. This government will do and say anything to survive the next election.