




Speech By
Peter Russo
MEMBER FOR TOOHEY

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CHEAPER POWER (SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION BILL)

 **Mr RUSSO** (Toohey—ALP) (6.42 pm): I rise to speak to the Cheaper Power (Supplementary Appropriation) Bill. The Cost of Living and Economics Committee in its report No. 5 tabled in the Assembly on 17 May recommended that the bill be passed. The purpose of the bill is to help Queensland families. Queensland families are experiencing a higher cost of living not due to anything that we have done but due to global pressures and the unrest that is going on in the world. The government has resolved to provide urgent cost-of-living relief through rebates applying to power bills. The government has decided to make these payments within the 2023-24 financial year as an unforeseen expenditure to provide urgent relief and to ensure that rebates cannot be revoked or reduced by a future government.

The energy rebates will provide \$1,000 to Queensland homes—and there will be a further \$300 from the federal government—and \$325 to small businesses that will be applied automatically to eligible electricity accounts. The rebates will be targeted as a lump sum credit from 1 July 2024. The existing \$372.20 in electricity rebates provided to pensioners and seniors will continue and will be paid to eligible households on top of the \$1,000, meaning that there are some households that will get a total rebate of \$1,372. Additional decisions can be made through the year that give rise to additional funding being required from the Consolidated Fund. Pursuant to section 35 of the Financial Accountability Act, these additional payments comprise unforeseen expenditure which then need to be appropriated through legislation.

Cost-of-living support is a key Queensland government priority. The government recognises the increased national cost-of-living pressures on household budgets which result from growing everyday expenses like mortgage repayments, rent, groceries and fuel. All stakeholders who made submissions to the inquiry raised the issue of targeting the payment to assist those who most need the help. The Queensland Council of Social Service welcomed the intent of the bill and submitted that low-income households are currently more likely to experience energy vulnerability and disadvantage and spend double the amount of their disposable income on energy than middle-income households. While welcoming the intent of the bill, the St Vincent de Paul Society Queensland recommended consideration of additional measures to address energy inequality, fuel, food and education costs. Adept Economics stated that the appropriation should be much smaller and that the government should target the assistance better because it is not means tested. The department responded to this by saying—

The delivery of cost-of-living support to Queensland residents via electricity bill relief is a longstanding policy initiative that multiple governments have utilised to deliver support to the Queensland community. It is a very effective and well-understood mechanism.

I commend the bill to the House.