




Speech By
Ray Stevens

MEMBER FOR MERMAID BEACH

Record of Proceedings, 5 March 2024

APPROPRIATION BILL (NO. 2)

 **Mr STEVENS** (Mermaid Beach—LNP) (12.16 pm): I rise to speak to the Appropriation Bill (No. 2). This supplementary bill highlights the extra expenditure in the May to June period last year of \$1.244 billion added to the previous supplementary of \$1.34 billion in terms of extra expenditure the Labor government has incurred on top of the budgeted almost \$70 billion for the state of Queensland, and yet again we can refer to this bill as another Labor cost blowout bill. I get the fact that these are in many cases unbudgeted expenditures that have come to the fore for different reasons, but with \$697 billion coming forward in terms of wages and super those EB negotiations would have been well known, as would the future super requirements. Unfortunately again through bad budgeting and bad financial management, these have not been included in the budgets for that year.

That is particularly evident for this government in all of its budgeting and projected financial costs to Queenslanders right across the board, and we have to look no further in terms of its infrastructure spends around the state to highlight the fact that its budgeting being totally incorrect is the reason that this Appropriation Bill (No. 2) is here in the House today. I remind people that we were assured that when the Cross River Rail project was put forward by then treasurer Jackie Trad it was going to come in at \$5.9 billion. I understand it is now at \$9 billion—just a fraction under today—and that is basically an overspend that is not far short of the 50 per cent mark. I am told by inside sources at Cross River Rail that the final figure will be closer to \$12 billion when it finally gets up and running.

In terms of budgeting matters for the Labor Party in Queensland, it is one of the reasons there is pain out there in the community about the cost of living because of the waste, the continued bad management of funds and the continual adding on of matters. As we know, soon all fines in Queensland are going up substantially. Yes, some of that money goes back into road improvements and transport improvements—I get all of those sorts of matters—but why is there an increase in penalties for wrongdoing that is making it even harder for those people who incur those penalties, many of whom are in low socio-economic areas? This means that they will have to pay more money to subsidise the government's bad spending and bad infrastructure planning. For example, with the Gabba redevelopment, the current Premier and then state development minister said, 'Yes, it's only going to cost a billion dollars to knock it down and start again,' getting rid of the poor little school in the neighbourhood as well.

The CFMEU said, 'Fellas, we have to do this so our workers can keep getting the BPIC payments on these infrastructure sites,' and that drives the cost of those infrastructure projects through the roof. Holland construction would not pay the BPIC price added to the light rail stage 3 through my electorate. They told the government, 'We're not paying it,' so when BPIC became part of the project the government had to stump up another \$250 million to pay for the blowout; otherwise, they would have had to re-tender. Holland was adamant that it was not going to pay it. It is all about the budgeting process, the finances and the government's lack of capacity to put together a proper financial package, which will be an impost on Queenslanders for the year to come and many years after that.

That does not take into account all of the waste that we see the government involving itself in. I see \$200 million dropping out the backdoor for the Wellcamp white elephant. That money will go onto the bankcard debt that the poor old Queensland taxpayers will have to stump up for every year. It just amazes me that this government keeps saying that these costs are blowing out because of the increasing cost of building and as a result of all of the people moving to Queensland. What it does not talk about is all of the extra money that it is getting from all of those people coming to Queensland in terms of the enormous kick in stamp duty for this year's budgeting et cetera and also the enormous kick in GST revenue provided directly to the state government as a result of the enormous number of people moving to Queensland. That is the income side of it.

All the government wants to do is justify its cost blowouts by saying, 'The costs have gone up and it is all terrible.' However, good planning would have allowed for those matters to be taken into account and large expenditures would not have been incurred, meaning appropriation bills would not be brought back to the parliament. As I said earlier, we have debated one supplementary appropriation bill and this is the second, seeking another \$1.2 billion. Basically, with cost blowouts the government talks in billions as though it does not matter. Unfortunately, it does not really matter to the people of Queensland, because \$1 billion does not resonate with anybody in the community. I cannot even imagine what \$1 billion would look like. I would really like to see \$1 million drop on my table, to be honest, but I cannot even visualise \$1 billion. Mr and Mrs Average Queenslanders just say, 'There's another \$1 billion gone and another \$1 billion on the bill. It's just the government spending more money on our behalf.'

What people do not realise is that that is driving our debt to \$150 billion. Going on memory, I worked out that it is about \$26,000 that every Queenslanders owe, including kids. That is what Queenslanders owe to the moneylenders who have enabled this Queensland government to go on a spending spree that rivals that of other states. On a comparative basis, at \$150 billion our debt is equivalent to or even more than that of Victoria, although I am not sure where that is at today. Victoria is a classic example to compare ourselves against. A large state like New South Wales has a debt that is not far in front of ours. I cannot understand why this government keeps failing in its project costings and its estimates for budgets going forward. This impacts areas such as the health system. They have had a few ministers. We had the current Premier, we had the member for Redcliffe—

Ms Bates: Four.

Mr STEVENS: We have had four; I thank the shadow minister, the member for Mudgeeraba. We have had four health ministers who have been unable to deal with the health system. It does not matter that they keep throwing money at it—and there is another \$697 million in this appropriation bill; it still does not fix the health service. It is still a broken system, by their own words. Those are the same words that former premier Bligh used before she left office, resoundingly, because of her inability to treat the health system in a proper financial manner. This also affects the Police Service, which is desperately in need of further funding and not just for 'proposed' officers, as the minister said one time in the parliament. It is absolutely important that we maintain our thin blue line but it is falling away, and that goes for all other matters.

It is a tragedy that my speaking time is coming to a close. I do not have far to go. It is a very disappointing fact that there are 20 speakers yet to speak on the bill. Twelve LNP speakers would like to speak, on behalf of their communities, on this very important financial bill that will affect their electorates. Debate is being curtailed by the business program that has been foisted on this parliament by the hubris of this government, which is arrogant and out of touch with the proper processes of democracy. This appropriation bill will not be dealt with in a reasonable manner. Certainly several hours would allow members—not only the 12 from our side but also nine from the government side—to speak to a bill that is very important to the financial operation of Queensland. That is a tragedy. It is a mark of a government that has been here for too long. It is a mark of a government that needs to be shown the door in 2024.