



Speech By  
**Samuel O'Connor**


**MEMBER FOR BONNEY**

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Record of Proceedings, 12 June 2024

**MOTION**

**Far North Queensland, Infrastructure**

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (5.49 pm): I rise in support of the shadow transport minister's motion. No-one in the Barron River electorate would get any confidence from that contribution from their current member. I do not know if anyone has done this in this debate yet, but I want to acknowledge Bree James, who is in the gallery. Bree is our outstanding candidate in Barron River. She is listening to locals and fighting for what matters to them, and there are not many bigger issues in the Barron River electorate than the Barron River bridge in Kuranda, where the situation has become a daily nightmare for locals. Labor have failed to find a solution in their decade in government, a time in which they have held all three seats in the area: Barron River, Cairns and Cook. The failure to fix this Barron River bridge issue is directly tied to Labor's time in power. Despite what the Treasurer—

**Mr Bleijie:** How long have they been in power for?

**Mr O'CONNOR:** I will take the interjection from the deputy leader. Despite what the Treasurer and Premier would like you to think—and I did a little bit of research in preparation for this speech—it turns out they were actually elected in 2015. The Labor government have been here since 2015—not last year. They are not new. That is actually the same year that fatigue cracks were found in several parts of the bridge's steel. Five years ago, the halfway point of this 'new' government, the situation was so serious that load limits were put on to manage heavy vehicles. This also meant reduced speeds and times when this key connector was brought down to a single lane. It can take five hours for a truck to go from Cairns to Mareeba.

It then took another two years for a small amount of funding to investigate the issues with the Barron River bridge. A community consultation on the bridge occurred around 200 days ago and there has been no outcome. Locals are frustrated with the impact this is having on their lives. There is one local who was clearly sick of making that drive—the Labor member for Cook. Driving over the range must have been such an issue for the member for Cook that she decided to move her electorate office from Mareeba to Cairns. That means the member does not have to endure driving over this bridge, unlike the thousands of people she represents.

What about the Labor member for Barron River? After originally dismissing the need for a solution when the planning study was released saying the existing road is not operating at its capacity, the Labor member now agrees and has been saying this is his No. 1 priority. If only the member had been in some sort of position of authority over, say, most of the last seven years! What was he doing around the cabinet table? Did he not raise this with any of his colleagues and fight to have it fixed?

The current member for Barron River has clearly not been successful in his new-found advocacy, either within or outside of cabinet. In the budget yesterday we saw the same \$8.98 million of planning funding that was there last year, as well as \$15 million for preconstruction. The devil is always in the

detail, though, because this preconstruction funding continues until 2026-27. That means that if this decade-old Labor government is re-elected the people of the Far North will not see any work begin until towards the end of the next parliamentary term.

All Labor know how to do is deny responsibility. We have heard a lot of references to previous LNP governments in this debate, but how far back does Labor's blame game go? The member for Barron River said on Facebook that in 1963, when the current bridge was built, it was supposed to last until 2063. Sixty-one years: that is how far back the blame game goes.

**Mr Langbroek:** The Nicklin government?

**Mr O'CONNOR:** I take that interjection from the member for Surfers Paradise. I reckon we are about a week away from the member for Barron River blaming the shameful Nicklin National Party government for their disgraceful decisions in the early 1960s. He will say that the ghost of Frank Nicklin is controlling the Liberal National Party in Queensland.

The member also said that his No. 1 priority was the Barron River bridge, but there was no construction money in the budget. The member for Barron River said that protecting the local northern beaches headland, Taylor Point, was also his No. 1 priority, but there was no acquisition funding for that land in the budget. I urge the member for Barron River—in fact, I plead with him—to please not make anything else his No. 1 priority because there is no better way to guarantee that thing will die. It will not get any funding and it will suffer the kiss of death that the member for Barron River gives to these projects.

What the people of Barron River need is a member who is not just focused on picking and choosing No. 1 priorities after a decade of inaction. They need a member focused on the right priorities. That person is Bree James. We are not asking for much today—just the condemnation of these members, because they thoroughly deserve it, and for this business case to be released. It is the very least that the Far North Queensland community deserve. They are sick of studies and surveys. We need to get this business case released.

*(Time expired)*