




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BONNEY

Record of Proceedings, 14 June 2024

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

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (12.05 pm): This is a budget all about getting a decade-old Labor government through the next four months until the state election; it is not one focused on setting a vision for the next four years or beyond for our state. That is especially true for my community on the Gold Coast. Barely anything new was funded in this budget. I do welcome the next part of the funding for the much needed but long delayed Gold Coast secure mental health rehabilitation unit at GCUH. We did get funding to upgrade the pedestrian and cycleway infrastructure between Village Boulevard and Olsen Avenue on Smith Street. That would not have been my top priority, but at least it is putting something useful into an area without removing car parks away from in front of people's houses as the state government is doing with the bikeway it is installing along Olsen Avenue as we speak.

There was a small amount of funding for the Gold Coast Health and Knowledge Precinct and an unspecified amount for a Labrador neighbourhood centre. We do not have a Labrador neighbourhood centre, but if there is funding to establish one on offer then I will absolutely take it and will advocate to connect it with our other community organisations.

Dr Rowan interjected.

Mr O'CONNOR: I take that interjection from the member for Moggill, who called me a great local member. Thank you. That is about it; there is nothing more for Bonney in this budget. Last year I called on the state government to prioritise developing housing on the two large blocks of state land in the Gold Coast Health and Knowledge Precinct, already zoned residential and right next to GCUH and Griffith University. Housing there would be perfect for students and healthcare workers. A year on and still the state government has not locked in a proposal for the site. Then there is the Coomera Connector, the second M1, which is stuck in the slow lane under Labor. It has been almost a decade since work began on planning and building that road, but Gold Coasters will still not be driving on even a small section of that road anytime soon. We see no funding to fix the Gold Coast Highway, Pine Ridge Road and Captain Cook Drive intersection. There was a \$660,000 business case completed at the end of last year. I encourage the minister to release it so we can at least know what the plan is and how much it will cost to upgrade that congestion nightmare.

Disappointingly we have also seen no infrastructure funding for my local schools. There is no new hall for the fast-growing Southport State High School. Five years on from when the state government committed to it, we have still not seen any funding for improved classrooms at Arundel State School where the students still suffer in demountables. There is no funding for the early years precinct at Musgrave Hill State School and no funding for shade sails or a new fence at Labrador State School.

The disappointment continues with the environment component of the state budget. The environment was such a low priority for this Labor government that the Treasurer did not even mention it in his budget speech. This year's environment budget shows how bereft of ideas Labor are for the conservation of what makes Queensland special. This is a tired, decade-old government that has simply run out of puff. Labor might want people to forget it has been in power for that long, but Queenslanders who care about our environment must assess whether our state is where we should be after a decade of Labor.

I will go through some key areas. The most significant: protected areas, our conservation estate. In 2015 it was the Premier himself, then the environment minister—it turns out he is not actually as 'new' as he claims—who personally committed to increase Queensland's protected estate to 17 per cent of our land area. He said—

Moving forward, the Palaszczuk government is committed to expanding our protected area estate towards the 17 per cent target.

At the time, 7.8 per cent of Queensland's land area was protected. We are at our final budget before the election and we now have 8.61 per cent of Queensland protected, according to the SDS. That is less than one per cent more of Queensland protected in a decade—less than one per cent. It is proof that this Premier and Labor are all about the announcement and never about the follow-through.

In my first budget reply as shadow environment minister I spoke about the government's lack of ambition with our protected estate. Back then, they had an aim of growing the estate by 0.01 per cent in the next year. I will give credit where it is due: the government has increased this ambition in this year's budget. It is quite some ambition: they have lifted that from 0.01 per cent to 0.02 per cent. Credit where credit is due for Labor. Under Labor, the most biodiverse state in the nation with the smallest proportion of any Australian jurisdiction will increase our estate by just 0.02 per cent!

Labor have had nine years and 10 budgets to make a difference to our protected estate and they have failed to deliver. The longer they have left this, the harder the job has become. Land is a lot more expensive. In a recent report the Auditor General stated—

In 2015, the Queensland Government made a long-term commitment to expand the area of protected land to 17 per cent. There was no time frame for when it would achieve this target.

In 2021, the median value of Queensland farmland increased 31.3 per cent per hectare since 2020. The increasing price of farmland will place greater pressure on the department's budget, potentially reducing the amount of land it can afford to acquire.

The delay in action will cost Queenslanders and has put us on the back foot when it comes to protecting more of Queensland. We need to better target public estate acquisitions and to complement these with a different approach to private land conservation. We cannot afford to solely focus on the state purchasing more national parks. We must also incentivise landholders to take part in the private protected area program with genuine stewardship incentives to make conservation an opportunity.

On climate action, overwhelmingly Queensland's transition is being undertaken through renewable energy investments made through our publicly owned energy corporations. The Liberal National Party has consistently reiterated our support for the continued public ownership of these corporations. The only project we have said we will not be proceeding with if we are successful this October is the Pioneer-Burdekin Pumped Hydro. Our state's decarbonisation should not be so reliant on one single project. If it fails, we will be left scrambling and could miss our bipartisan emissions reduction targets. These projects are complex. They will come with environmental impacts.

It makes sense to share the risk among several smaller pumped hydro projects instead of just putting it all on Pioneer-Burdekin—a project with no feasibility study, no environmental assessments, no business case and with the budget before us containing only \$38 million of what we are told could be a total cost of more than \$20 billion for actual work on the project. Stakeholders such as the Queensland Conservation Council have rightly reserved their judgement on this project, with its director Dave Copeman saying yesterday on the ABC—

What we made very clear is that we are concerned about the environmental impacts of large pumped hydro systems. We know that they can have a really big impact on both the rivers and the aquatic species that depend on it, but also on the area that's flooded. You know effectively you're flooding large areas and we wanted to make sure before we made the decision that we could properly assess this because we know the impact of not transitioning will be catastrophic for hundreds of species across Australia, but at the same time we want to plan the transition that doesn't impact overly on nature.

The fact is that the state government, with all its resources, does not have a clear, detailed plan for the storage component of our transition to renewable energy. There are storage alternatives to Pioneer-Burdekin to ensure Queenslanders continue to have affordable, reliable and sustainable electricity supplies. They will be a priority for the LNP.

The Liberal National Party has also said many times that conserving our environment cannot just be about locking up land and thinking the job is done. The now Premier agreed when back in 2015 he said—

Acquiring land is the easy part; it is ongoing management that is the most important. Unless there is adequate funding, the conservation values that led the area to be protected in the first place will be undermined.

Unfortunately, the now Premier said this without any follow-up. I was hoping to see funding for our natural resource management organisations in this year's budget after they have already experienced cuts from this government, but, sadly, this support is nowhere to be seen.

NRMs protect and restore coastal ecosystems as well as myriad other projects. So much is possible through their Nurturing Nature: Cultivating Culture proposal. They are a bit different from Labor as they are focused on outcomes and are trusted across regional Queensland, but I would have hoped the government could have recognised the positive contributions they make and would have supported our NRMs to keep delivering practical environmental outcomes on the ground.

When it comes to resource recovery and waste management, we are nowhere near where we should be. We have the worst recycling rates in the nation. Since the waste strategy came out, the diversion of household waste has only worsened. Organic waste is one of the specific areas where the government has left us trailing the nation. Queensland has the lowest percentage of the population with access to food organic kerbside collection of any state. Many of the people who have moved here from New South Wales and Victoria tell me that they cannot believe the separation of organics is not just a normal part of every household in Queensland. On the most recent data, Queensland is also only on track to reach two of our nine waste targets by 2025. Our state's overall recycling rate was down to 51 per cent in 2022, so we are almost certainly not going to reach the government's target of 60 per cent by 2025.

While this government's inaction means it is unlikely we will meet many of its 2025 targets, we must see a turnaround to get to our 2030 targets. Organics recycling is good for our environment and good for our economy. Despite Queensland lagging behind, the organics recycling industry saves us over half a million tonnes of carbon dioxide, the equivalent of over 134,000 cars, every year. We know how damaging methane can be, so it is a no-brainer to increase the recycling of organics to further reduce our carbon emissions. Right now it also provides 748 jobs in Queensland, paying over \$57 million in wages, and contributes \$116 million to the economy. That is without the sector thriving. An LNP government will improve our recycling rates, and there is some urgency to do this. Because of the time Labor has squandered, if we do not get on the right track in the next term of government the sustainability credentials of the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games will be in tatters.

In 2018 the Auditor-General released its report *Conserving threatened species* with recommendations for the government to act. The follow-up report was released last year, and it was a demonstration of everything we know about this government. They had only delivered two of the seven recommendations. They released the biodiversity conservation strategy with no measures or targets, and three years after it was due.

The funding provided in this budget, which is some of the only new environment funding in it, is welcome, but the small scale of it will give no confidence to Queenslanders about our ability to prevent further extinctions. The Auditor-General also found—

Since 2013, the Department of Environment and Science has approved 3 ecotourism facilities in national parks, with 2 more in development. The approval processes and delivery of these developments were lengthy, complex, and costly. The absence of a statewide policy on ecotourism means it is difficult to measure the development of ecotourism outside Queensland's protected areas.

Just three facilities in nine years. It is a failure to make the most of our environment. We have people from around the world who want to come and see it. We need sensible, sustainable projects that help to conserve our environment through education and awareness.

In terms of the Great Barrier Reef, we heard at the end of May that we will not hit the 2025 targets for reef water quality, with the Australian Marine Conservation Society stating—

The Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan aims to cut dissolved inorganic nitrogen ... levels by 60% by 2025, but to date nitrogen levels have been cut by less than half that amount, 28.4%, compared with the 2009 baseline. The latest Reef report card shows they were cut by only 0.7% in the two years to 2022, and at that rate the target will not be met until 2114.

It is just another failure of this government and another reason they should be investing more significantly in best management practice programs to support people on the land to change their practices and increase their yields.

Innovation under this government has mostly been a talkfest with little results. This week, the LNP announced a Small and Family Business Innovation Pathway to directly engage Queensland small and family businesses for short-term initiatives up to \$1 million to solve specific problems or improve government service delivery to try to foster new and innovative ideas in our public sector. Again, it is about genuine action and outcomes that will make a difference to the lives of Queenslanders.

The Treasurer might not have mentioned the environment in his budget speech, but the opposition leader certainly did in his budget reply. I repeat his words which indicate what a Crisafulli LNP government would prioritise when it comes to our environment. The Liberal National Party will be driven by results. We will improve our recycling rates. We will partner with landholders to voluntarily protect more of Queensland and ensure it is properly managed. We will make sure the state government is no longer the worst neighbour you can have through better bushfire and biosecurity management. We will deliver sustainable ecotourism opportunities by creating more world-class experiences to drive conservation through education. All of that can only happen if Queenslanders show Labor the door in 2024.