



Speech By
Samuel O'Connor

MEMBER FOR BONNEY

Record of Proceedings, 20 August 2024


APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

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Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation Bill

Health, Environment and Agriculture Committee, Report

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (7.24 pm): This is the 10th and hopefully final budget of the Palaszczuk-Miles Labor government. After a decade it is clear that they have run out of ideas to better protect Queensland's natural environment. The Treasurer did not even mention the environment in his budget speech, probably because there is very little new funding included in this year's budget. Stakeholders said that this budget lacks a vision for our environment. In my short time I will highlight some of the topics I questioned the minister about at the estimates hearing.

The No. 1 priority for the environment portfolio should be to protect and properly manage more of Queensland. Our conservation area is the lowest proportion of any part of Australia that is protected, at just 8.59 per cent. The minister again could not provide a timeline for when Labor's expansion target would be met so we must judge this government on their record of delivery. The minister even confirmed that the government does not agree with the doubling by 2030, as many stakeholders were led to believe. The budget revealed that over the last decade just 0.79 per cent of our state's land area has been protected by the Palaszczuk-Miles government.

One method of conservation that I have been asking about for several years now is OECMs and the potential for properties categorised under this framework to be added to our protected estate. The department confirmed that Emeritus Professor Marc Hockings found that up to 20 million hectares might be appropriate for assessment, although that was before the national framework was finalised. I will be interested in following that up further. However, we cannot just increase the estate through a recategorisation in that way. Nature refuges need to be part of the solution. They give us the opportunity to get the balance right between our environment and agricultural production.

The inadequate management of our current private protected areas has been jointly raised by the Queensland Conservation Council, AgForce, NRM Regions Queensland and the Pew Charitable Trusts in a letter to the minister, but their calls have gone unanswered. The tiny amount of funding currently provided to landholders is not giving them a genuine incentive to join this program. At the hearing we found out that over the past financial year, out of 574 across the state, just 19 landholders had put in an expression of interest for the small amount of NatureAssist grant funding available. This lack of a genuine incentive means only 52 landholders looked at having their property become a nature refuge over the same period.

On the Pioneer-Burdekin Pumped Hydro proposal—a project with no feasibility study, let alone a business case—not much has changed. It is still not a coordinated project, which means that the EIS process has not even started nearly two years after it was announced by the government. The minister has not visited the site despite committing to do so at last year’s estimates hearing. It is a hydro hoax.

We found out that the millions of poppers collected by Queenslanders through COEX are no longer being exported to India. Now they are going even further around the world to Spain. Last year we were assured that there was no issue with the exporting of these items to India because there was no evidence they were not being recycled. That begs the question: why are they now going to Spain? We learned there is no date for the opening of the facility that was coincidentally announced when these issues were revealed 18 months ago, despite claims that it would be open by June this year.

On organic waste recycling, which is essential if Queensland is to lift its game and not have the worst recycling rates of any state in the nation, we found out the minister has not met the key organisations WRIQ, AORA and the Waste Management and Resource Recovery Association, who urgently wrote to the minister over a month ago—

Ms Linard: Look at my diary. I met them all a month ago.

Mr O’CONNOR: It was not after the letter was written, Minister, and you confirmed that at the hearing, but that is okay. It has been more than a month since they asked to meet on this urgent query to resolve the issues on how the government has ‘done all it can to make the FOGO industry in Queensland unviable’.

In terms of the Premier’s luxury accommodation for the BIO conference, four nights of his accommodation could be equivalent to the amount given to six Queensland companies to go to the same conference, which was \$16,662. On PsiQuantum, the department which oversaw the quantum strategy was not even consulted on the decision to invest in that company.