




Speech By  
**Sandy Bolton**

**MEMBER FOR NOOSA**

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### **CHEAPER POWER (SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION BILL)**

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (9.14 pm): As we have heard, this bill provides some welcome cost-of-living relief for Queenslanders, but let's look at this carefully. In this financial year, some \$2.27 billion is being appropriated for a cost-of-living payment delivered through electricity bills, rolled out to Queensland households from 1 July 2024, with each receiving \$1,000. All Queensland customers classified as residential under the National Energy Retail Law who are individually metered with an energy retailer or embedded network electricity supplier will be eligible. This means those not in hardship will also receive the rebate. Happily, the \$372 payment that was provided as a supplement to last year's electricity rebate will continue for those on concessions, such as those with seniors cards and healthcare cards. As well, eligible Queensland small businesses will receive a \$325 small business rebate. I have spoken to people in my community and they are deeply appreciative of this.

Queenslanders who were already under hardship pre-COVID have borne the brunt of its ongoing fallout, including the outrageous prices of basics such as food and inflation higher than it has been for years. Rents continue to climb and interest rates are pushing up mortgage repayments. The stress is felt every day of every month by those Queenslanders. Our residents are facing enormous financial and emotional difficulties, leading to a decrease in physical and mental health.

The growth in GDP per person for Queensland was zero last year, which was lower than all other states except the Northern Territory. Yes, some relief is better than none. However, the \$1,000 payment is a blunt instrument. Those who have no need for the rebate, such as all of us MPs in this chamber, get as much as those in dire need. If an analysis were done of that \$2 billion-plus cost, how much more may have been available for those in genuine need? As I have done before, I will be putting my \$1,000 directly towards assisting my residents who are in hardship but are not eligible via fuel vouchers or otherwise.

QCOSS and St Vincent de Paul welcome the intent of the bill. However, they also raised the equity impact of a flat payment and of using the electricity mechanism to identify eligible households. Why? Because it does not flow to Queenslanders whose premises are not separately metered or who do not receive a separate electricity bill, as many have power included as part of their rent. Further, those in desperate need, including Queenslanders experiencing homelessness or living in supported accommodation, will not benefit from the rebate.

Queensland Treasury said that it cannot target as required because the Queensland government does not hold, nor will the federal government provide, income details in relation to individuals and that the current method is the best available. If this were the first time using this approach, that excuse may make sense. However, Treasury said that delivering cost-of-living support via electricity bill relief is a long-standing policy initiative that multiple governments have utilised. Surely over all those years, and maybe decades, improvements could have been made. We have all kinds of data on Queensland residents and we cooperate with the Commonwealth in incredible detail in all kinds of policy areas. Surely we should have been able to figure this out by now.

Despite the support provided by state and federal governments through the various energy cost rebate schemes, St Vincent de Paul found that these are difficult for low-income families to navigate and assistance to do so would be helpful. They also identified other areas for much needed support. This included the rollout of household clean technology such as small-scale solar storage and energy-efficiency upgrades. Every year the demand for additional support grows, including for medium-income families, in back-to-school expenses, financial counselling services and access to no-interest loans.

Cost-of-living relief through rebates and subsidisation appears to be our new norm and we need to ask why. I thank the member for Maiwar and other members who have been unpacking some of this for us. We have to ask ourselves: at what point will Queenslanders and Australians not be reliant on these measures in order to sustain them? Where are the investigations that go beyond supermarket prices? What about the outrageous cost of fuel and insurance? The fact that neither side of this House raised fuel during a motion regarding the cost of living, especially when it is a leading contributor to household stress, not only raises more questions but also raises eyebrows in the community.

Finally, I thank the minister, the department, the committee and the secretariat for their work on this bill and to all who participated in the inquiry. Before I finish, I want to thank the Leader of the House for the extended time, on top of our extensions today, which has actually allowed many more of us to speak on this bill.