




Speech By  
**Stephen Andrew**

**MEMBER FOR MIRANI**

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

 **Mr ANDREW** (Mirani—PHON) (3.43 pm): I rise to contribute to the annual debate on the budget papers. I start by thanking the government for the many funding allocations made in the budget that I know will directly benefit the people of Mirani. I start with the funding allocation of \$6.5 million for refurbishments at the Sarina State High School. Like many other schools in the region, Sarina State High School is in dire need of upgrades, improvements and teachers. This modest injection of cash will be welcomed by the school's teachers and students as well as the whole community.

I also thank the government for its commitment to providing 118 extra teachers for the Central Queensland region and 79 extra teachers for the Mackay region, which is great. However, there is no point boosting numbers if there is no way to house people when they arrive. That is an issue that we have. I am disappointed about my appeals for urgent action on the worsening teacher shortage crisis at Sarina State High School. Such shortages have devastating impacts on student learning outcomes. Last year, 11 candidates rejected the school's offer of employment expressly citing the area's lack of accommodation and day care facilities. Mount Morgan is also impacted. I am hopeful the minister will divert funding towards the construction or purchase of dedicated teacher accommodation near Sarina State High School.

I am sorry to see nothing in the budget papers by way of funding or support for the people of Finch Hatton. Recently, a temporary planning instrument and flooding overlay was imposed on the township and its surrounding areas. Last year I wrote to the minister asking for funding so the community could work with Reef Catchments to carry out flood management and mitigation work and for the old river management trust to be restored. All of the material that is taken from the river systems can be repurposed to build roads. River maintenance is crucial when it comes to mitigating the impacts from heavy rainfall events at Finch Hatton. Virtually all of the damage those events cause is because no maintenance or management works have been carried out on Eungella waterways for decades. I beg the minister to reconsider this request.

By my calculations, this year's budget allocates some \$1.147 billion to projects and programs within the electorate of Mirani. Of course, most of that \$1.147 billion relates specifically to the government's massive green energy infrastructure program. I am glad to hear the opposition say today that they would scrap that idea. We do not want that in the electorate of Mirani. The budget includes hundreds of millions of dollars in funding allocations for the construction of habitat destroying wind factories within my electorate. Lotus Creek and Boulder Creek boast thriving koala populations as well as many other endangered or threatened species and their habitat will be smashed by those developments. No doubt those projects will create many job and business opportunities for local communities so I will make no further comment about them for now as most people know my view on the matter.

However, I do want to comment on the other big renewable allocation in my electorate, the Pioneer-Burdekin Pumped Hydro project. I have spoken at length about the environmentally destructive impact of this project. The opposition also understands its destructive nature, which is great. I will make just a few comments on the economic aspects of the project.

Getting any kind of pumped hydro project up and running is a notoriously difficult, time-consuming and expensive exercise at the best of times. We need only look at what has happened with Snowy 2.0 to understand the scale of the problems we would be taking on with such a project. Added to that is the fact that pumped hydro is a net consumer of electricity. Across the whole spectrum, pumped storage projects consume roughly 30 per cent more electricity pumping water uphill than they generate by running the water back downhill. It will drain our electricity grid by consuming electricity, most of which comes from burning fossil fuels, making the whole thing utterly absurd. Like other pumped hydro operations, it will struggle to meet its debt repayments and operating costs, let alone turn a profit. The government has pinned its hopes for shutting down Queensland's coal-fired power stations by 2035 on the construction of two mega pumped hydro projects at a cost of around \$30 billion—that we know of. They have bet the state of Queensland on a single project before a single soil study, geotechnical or seismic test has been done and before a detailed and fully costed business case has been done.

There are two projects that I am pleased to see have received generous allocations: the Mount Morgan and Fitzroy to Gladstone water pipelines. Sadly, neither of those pipelines will have water offtakes for the Fitzroy agricultural corridor. I do not know why it is called an 'agricultural corridor' because there is hardly any water there and most people do not have an allocation. Both projects represent substantial investments in the region's water security, which is something that I have lobbied for long and hard and we do need to expand that to most of the regions. I am disappointed that no water from the Fitzroy to Gladstone pipeline will be diverted to the lower Fitzroy agricultural corridor, but I will continue to push for that. I will talk with the mayor about allocations and how we can split that up. In the meantime, both pipelines will deliver many dividends in the way of plentiful jobs and economic gains that will benefit the whole region.

In other good news, Stanwell Power Station has been allocated \$52 million for refurbishment and upgrade works, for which I thank the minister. Keeping Stanwell in good working order is vital for maintaining the efficiency and reliability of our electricity supply in Queensland. While there are many misguided calls to close the state's coal-fired power stations, Stanwell is still a relatively young plant and has decades of life remaining in it. Central Queenslanders understand that the coal sector means economic growth and well-paid, productive jobs for the regions. They also know that coal-fired power stations are key to providing the reliable power generation which drives growth and development in the regions. At any given time in Queensland, up to 80 per cent of the state's electricity is powered by fossil fuels, a considerable amount of which comes from our coal.

The people of Mirani will also benefit from the generous allocations made in the budget for hospitals and health services. Both the Rockhampton HHS and the Mackay Base HHS do an outstanding job. I know a lot of the people who work there personally. I have had a lot of dealings with them over the past couple of months because my father has been there for quite some time with a broken hip. I thank them for their service and for what they have done. I would particularly like to thank the government for delivering a major upgrade and 128 extra beds for Mackay Base Hospital to meet the region's growing demand for quality health care.

I had hoped there might be something in the budget enabling the Mackay Base Hospital's helipad to remain operational during the hospital's redevelopment period. The helipad provides a critical service for the people of the Mackay region. It is imperative that CQ Rescue choppers are able to land within close proximity to the hospital's emergency care, and I implore the minister to work with Mackay hospital and the local community to find a solution to this problem. We have discussed it. In a region where we have many road, farming and mine accidents, lives will be put at risk if the helicopter is forced to land away from that area.

This year's budget dishes out a staggering \$11.2 billion in concessions and rebates to struggling Queenslanders. While I am happy that struggling households are getting something put in their pockets during the current cost-of-living crisis, it is hard not to see the government's cash splash as a blatant vote-buying exercise which risks driving up inflation and house prices yet again—something that will only be made much worse by the government's massive infrastructure on green energy projects.

The Miles government has doubled down on new investment in capital works across hospitals, energy, rail, roads and schools in the 2024-25 Queensland budget. Where other state governments have been disciplined in their spending and debt management in the current environment, Queensland has thrown caution to the wind, I believe, and pushed public debt to record levels.

Infrastructure funding in Queensland is forecast to shoot up by 22.8 per cent, or \$10.3 billion, over the next four years, bringing general government infrastructure funding to \$55.6 billion. Much of this investment will be directed towards billion dollar construction cost overruns such as the Coomera Connector, Rockhampton Ring Road and the Logan and Gold Coast Faster Rail. The budget's massive infrastructure spending is disturbing for a state once known for its fiscal responsibility.

In addition, the government's bloated public sector workforce has reached farcical proportions. According to the Auditor-General, Labor has added more than 34,000 workers to the public sector since 2015, with an annual wages bill of more than \$67 billion. The creation of so many public sector jobs removes workers from the private sector, where they could be more profitably and productively employed. More importantly, it shifts vital resources away from the true wealth creators to those who are dependent on the public purse.

The budget papers show deficits returning next financial year while gross general government debt combined with the borrowings of government owned corporations is forecast to take the total of Queensland's borrowings to \$188 billion by 2027-28. The annual interest on this debt will cripple the economy. In the meantime, real wages in Queensland have fallen by around five per cent since 2022. National account figures show that real household disposable income, a measure of living standards, fell 5.6 per cent over 2023 and 8.3 per cent over the last two years.

Across Queensland, working-class households are suffering enormous financial and personal stress, with visibly rising levels of poverty and homelessness, which is a disgrace especially in our beautiful and rich state. Foodbank queues are growing and more people are living in cars and tents. Added to all this are Queensland's skyrocketing prices of electricity, insurance, rates and land values which just keep pushing interest rates, rents and other costs higher.

The green energy transition has barely begun and already AEMO is warning of widespread energy shortages, blackouts and price hikes towards the end of the year. This means cold showers in the dark for Queenslanders. Hardest hit will be those on low incomes, especially in the regions.