




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR GYMPIE

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

 **Mr PERRETT** (Gympie—LNP) (12.46 pm): I rise to speak on the 2024 budget. The budget is proof that the government's real priorities are about power—on re-election—not Queensland. Year after year, it has boasted about record budgets, yet Queenslanders are worse off and there is less to show. The Treasurer pathetically pleaded with Queenslanders to ignore its record. The Premier and Treasurer and ministers who sat around the cabinet table are asking to be absolved of almost a decade of decisions. It is pitiful. The past 10 years of decisions have delivered a health crisis, a crime crisis, a housing crisis and a cost-of-living crisis. If there were no crises, we would not be asked to ignore the past nine years.

Despite revenue rivers of gold, Labor has delivered record debt and record taxes. It has delivered record numbers of people sleeping in tents, of crime victims, of ambulance ramping, of waiting lists and of people struggling to make ends meet. The government scraped the bottom of the barrel to find Gympie projects to showcase. The government's glossy brochure included a project which has no business case or passed major assessments. It has included cost blowouts and, yet again, pushed projects out to another year. Years of announcements have delivered little.

The proposed Borumba Pumped Hydro project is yet to receive federal government environmental approvals and assessment. It still has not received environmental approvals from the Office of the Coordinator-General, and the government refuses to release the business case for the project. Despite all the self-congratulations, the Capital Statement qualified any budget commitment, saying the project is subject to final approvals by the Queensland and Australian governments. The environmental approvals have been outstanding since June last year, when the federal environment minister requested a more detailed report into the project. It was the federal government environmental assessment, or the EPBC Act, which sank the proposed Traveston Crossing Dam. That fiasco destroyed Mary Valley communities and cost Queensland taxpayers half a billion dollars in losses.

The funding for the Gympie Bypass is part of an ongoing commitment to deliver the project. The federal government funds the bulk of this project, or 80 per cent of the cost. The project, which has been going on for years, is expected to be open this year. Last Saturday, the *Courier-Mail* revealed that the increased funds are a down payment on a cost blowout. The minister has ignored my request for a briefing about the project and an onsite meeting about the progress of the bypass. Meanwhile, the government refuses to deal with the horror stretch from Gympie to Maryborough. There is nothing for the planning, design or delivery of any upgrade from Curra to Bauple. The RACQ told the *Courier-Mail* yesterday that the stretch was so bad that 40 per cent of it rated two stars out of five for road infrastructure.

In a new funding deal with the state government, the federal Labor government has ripped money out of the project. An 80-20 split in funding has now been reduced to 50-50. It is an indictment on this government when the federal minister said—

... both levels of government carry an equal share of risks and accountability for fiscal discipline ...

The housing crisis is biting hard in the Gympie electorate. A tight vacancy rate is between zero per cent and 2.5 per cent. The REIQ's March quarterly rental report showed Gympie vacancies were at 1.1 per cent. Whether you call it social or crisis housing, very little is available across the Gympie region. People are living in tents, under bridges, in the main street and in their cars. Charity groups—those that provide help for the vulnerable—are being stretched. The glossy brochure boasts about delivering 14 social homes constructed through 'traditional means'. No-one knows what the government means by 'traditional means'. Queenslanders and Gympie residents are paying the price because housing is treated as a political issue. The LNP will get it right. Our commitment of a bold housing plan across six policy areas to secure housing foundations across the next two decades will ease the pressure on the housing crisis.

In a record \$28.9 billion health budget, the government said nothing about delivering a new hospital for Gympie. It announced 800 new FTE positions and a \$1.8 billion budget for the Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service. Gympie did not even get three extra staff. Gympie Hospital has been allocated a \$620,000 funding boost and 2.6 full-time-equivalent staff. The government's own Master Clinical Services Plan says Gympie needs a new hospital. We are now into the fifth year since the government was told the Gympie Hospital cannot provide the level of service needed. The report found—

The existing Gympie Hospital infrastructure creates significant clinical and operational challenges, with services spread across multiple, poorly connected, multi-aged buildings. The fragmented operation of the facility is exacerbated by the steep topography of the site, and the inherent forms and structural constraints of the aged buildings.

The hospital cannot be patched. The report said—

... there is a need to move away from incremental capital works in favour of a broader investment in the site.

On every measure, Gympie has systemic problems. Since 2015 every budget has contained a record investment in health, yet the outcomes are worse and services in Gympie have declined. Hardworking staff are doing their best but they deserve better. Patients and their families are distressed and frustrated as services are run down or closed.

I welcome the \$1.116 million for security fencing at James Nash State High School and \$1.6 million for amenities upgrades at the One Mile State School. I heard that the security fence is needed to keep intruders out of the school and the students in. It is a sad indictment when security fencing is one of the few budget allocations for the Gympie region. The Gympie United Football Club will receive \$156,852 to upgrade lighting, but there was nothing else announced for local sporting and community groups.

The \$3 million for the replacement of the Gympie south fire station is for only part of the project. When most of the project funding is pushed out to the 2025-26 year, it is clear that the government has no intention to deliver the project within the next 18 months. Ever since I was elected in 2015, I have advocated for a new station. Land was purchased in 2014—a decade ago. The start dates have bounced from year to year. Three years ago the minister claimed the current station was functional and again delayed the project. Most of the project's funding is pushed out, making it at least 12 years in the making.

Rainbow Beach Police Station is underneath a house. It cannot provide the same level of services as a police station. It urgently needs a properly designated police station and additional personnel and resources. For several years, I have called for a replacement facility. The Capital Statement shows \$500,000 for a project which is expected to cost \$2.3 million. I assume land must have been purchased and this is for the settlement costs, but no-one knows.

There is nothing about upgrading and additional personnel at Imbil Police Station or extra Gympie police. Imbil's approved strength of two is grossly inadequate in a region of 6,500 people. There are long periods when only one operates there. The station has no interview room, no holding cell and barely enough room for the two staff. The approved strength should be four. Gympie police are doing their best with limited manpower and resources. Padding police numbers or using tricky definitions about frontline staff is unacceptable.

Years of capital statements show no major investment in the infrastructure my region needs. We need investment in more social housing, roads, bridges and high-quality sporting facilities, and funding for a multipurpose entertainment and sport facility and flood-proofing transport corridors.

After a decade, it is clear the government does not value agriculture. Lack of support and regulatory burdens translate into higher prices at the check-out. There is no assistance with crippling labour shortages and exorbitant input costs. While other departments have increased funding, DAF's funding does not keep pace with the need. This time it has been cut by more than \$100 million from the actual spend. AgForce CEO, Michael Guerin, was scathing, saying he saw—

... the treasurer making a big song of dance about our state's net debt to revenue being the lowest in Australia but no interest in using the balance sheet to further assist the agriculture industry.

It's been hard to find much to like ... when it comes to agriculture, especially seeing the decrease in the budget for Biosecurity Queensland.

Biosecurity funding is cut by \$18 million as we face significant biosecurity challenges from fire ants, fall armyworm, lumpy skin disease, foot-and-mouth disease, bird flu and invasive pests and weeds. The government is losing the war on fire ants. The treatment area grows daily. The minister refuses to listen to the recommendations of three independent reports which have been scathing about the lack of progress, mismanagement, shortfalls and KPI failures. The minister is responsible for the systemic mismanagement.

Biosecurity funds are cut, yet staff numbers are projected to rise by 66 per cent. I am cautious about the increased staff numbers because the government has serious form in trickery and padding staff numbers on a spreadsheet. Last year it had 913 staff in 'enabling agriculture industry growth'. This year it has been cut by 19. There is a \$4 million capital grant to finalise long-term actions on the future of the former agricultural training colleges. They were run down by the agriculture minister and ceased operating in 2019. They were sold in 2021. Two years ago DAF budgeted a \$4 million capital grant and a \$2.7 million capital project commitment. Last year it was a \$4 million grant and \$2.1 million project. That is more than \$16 million and more than three years to finalise decisions. What is left to do?

In the middle of a housing crisis, the government is unable to understand the contribution of its anti-forestry and anti-timber agenda. The severe shortage of timber is pushing up renovation and building costs. The systemic failed timber policies spanning years of successive Labor governments have directly resulted in increased housing and renovation costs. It is almost 4½ years since the government promised a timber action plan. In 2019 it promised to undertake a two-year study to identify sustainable future options for timber supply. We are still waiting. Timber Queensland is concerned that this lack of action is impacting the supply and cost of housing frames, flooring, decking beams and trusses. Meanwhile, contracts for native timber logging will cease at the end of this year. The LNP will deliver a landmark Queensland timber action plan to secure the sustainable timber supply needed to build homes in Queensland.

For a decade the government has undermined the fishing sector. Through drastic regulatory decisions which lack transparency around stock assessments, lack supporting evidence around scientific reasons and biomass assessments and lack fairness regarding compensation packages, the government fails the industry. The minister refuses to conduct regulatory impact statements. It is either ignorant or incompetent.

As the opposition leader said yesterday, the LNP has a vision for Queensland to be at the cutting edge in farm productivity. We want Queensland to be envied when it comes to agriculture. Lower input costs to see better yields for our growers, trusted advice from a government which growers see as a partner, not an inhibitor, and new opportunities through AgTech or new training opportunities will be the hallmark of an LNP government. We want to see Queensland producing more sustainably grown local timber and taking advantage of new, exciting add-on industries and manufacturing that work alongside it. More timber supplies will push down prices and undoubtedly provide relief to the cost of home builds and renovations.

The government must use trusted and transparent science to make informed decisions regarding fisheries. It must conduct regulatory impact statements to understand the possible impact of any changes in regulation. The budget fails to deliver the long-term solutions Gympie residents and Queenslanders are demanding and deserve.