




Speech By
Bree James

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

Record of Proceedings, 26 March 2026

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) (SUPPLEMENTARY 2024-2025) BILL;
APPROPRIATION (SUPPLEMENTARY 2024-2025) BILL**

 **Ms JAMES** (Barron River—LNP) (8.52 pm): Let's call this for what it is: this bill is not just a line item; it is the receipt for a decade of Labor mismanagement. Needing to come back to parliament to ask for an extra \$5.7 billion is not a rounding error or bad luck; that is the result of a former government that simply could not manage a budget. Queenslanders are the ones left paying the price.

Let's break it down. Labor's last budget was not built to last a year; it was built to limp through an election, like something limp, lifeless and ready for retirement. It was full of sugar hits and brain farts, with ideas of state owned fuel stations—nothing says cost-of-living relief quite like putting the same people who blew out the budget in charge of petrol prices. Can you imagine the prices right now? My other favourite was the free school lunches. That was another headline grabber followed by a soggy sandwich series on socials to jam it home—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lister): Member for Barron River, I did not hear it myself, but I understand that you used a phrase which was unparliamentary. I ask you to withdraw.

Ms JAMES: I withdraw. My other favourite was free school lunches—another headline grabber followed by a soggy sandwich series on socials by the former Labor premier to jam it home.

Mr O'Connor: They would have been soggy, too.

Ms JAMES: Yes, it takes a certain kind of genius to think making sandwiches online the night before school counts as leadership. That is pretty stale, for sure. Free school lunches sounded good until we asked who was paying and how they were planning to deliver them, with a major shortage of volunteers and commercial kitchens in schools. Again, it was another sugar hit idea that was uncoded and unbudgeted in a hope to get re-elected.

That was just their election campaign. Let's talk about what they did as a government. The Labor Party underfunded frontline services knowingly. They buried cost blowouts deliberately. They left behind a trail of budget black holes that we are now cleaning up. We need over \$2 billion extra for Queensland Health alone and hundreds of millions more for child safety, housing and victim support. Theirs was a so-called budget that did not even fund the services that people rely on every single day. What does that tell us? It tells us that Labor were not managing the books; they were managing headlines.

Even independent observers saw it. There were warnings about a waning fiscal discipline, rising debt, structural deficits and a credit rating under pressure. Let's not forget the big ones—the projects that blew out billions. Cross River Rail has ballooned far beyond what Queenslanders were told, and a hospital was announced but there was no funding to run it. Promises were made, headlines were secured and reality was ignored. When the truth caught up, they split their own blowouts across multiple bills hoping that no-one would notice, but Queenslanders notice. They notice when services are not there. They notice when infrastructure stalls. They notice when governments promise more than they can deliver. Most importantly, they voted for change.

Queenslanders do not want spin; they want stability, honesty and a government that respects their money. They want a government that manages a budget like we manage our own budgets in our own homes and our own businesses—like real, responsible and normal human beings who have not been on the government gravy train their whole professional life. That is exactly what we on this side of the House are delivering.

Let me talk about what it looks like on the ground, because this is where it matters—not in budget papers and not in press releases but in real outcomes for real communities. In my community of Far North Queensland we are getting on with the job. We are investing in health because people deserve access to care when they need it, not months or years down the track. We are investing a record \$1 billion, and it is underway. We are stabilising elective surgery waitlists. We are investing in hospital infrastructure. We are making sure that when we announce a hospital we have the funds to operate it. That is the difference.

A government member: What a novel idea.

Ms JAMES: I know—it is novel. We are investing in roads and transport because in Far North Queensland distance matters. Better roads mean safer travel. The Western Arterial Road, the Bruce Highway and the brand new Barron River bridge mean stronger connections between communities and economic opportunity, because when goods and people can move regions grow.

Importantly, we are delivering permanent 50-cent fares, which is real cost-of-living relief for families, workers and students. It is not a trial. It is not a short-term fix. It is permanent. We are also investing in housing and community safety because every Queenslander deserves a safe place to live. We are filling the funding gaps Labor left behind in housing and homelessness services. We are backing victim support. We are addressing the pressures that were ignored for too long.

We are investing in something that matters deeply to Far North Queensland: tourism and lifestyle. This is not just about visitors; it is about jobs, local pride and building communities where people want to live, work and stay. Under the former tourism minister and member for Cairns, tourism was set to have a 95 per cent budget cut, dropping from \$160 million to \$8 million. They were going to halve the budget of Queensland's premier tourism marketing body—TEQ—in the lead-up to the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Can you imagine what that would have meant for Far North Queensland and tourism, with one in seven people employed by tourism in Far North Queensland? They had nothing for events in Cairns, nothing for aviation and nothing for product development. It is absolutely shameful.

We will be investing \$1 billion in tourism over the next four years. Let's not forget to remind everyone about the Wangetti Trail fail—Australia's most expensive footpath with a budget blowout costing \$22.5 million for 7.8 kilometres of trail because the member for Cairns wanted stage 1 delivered before the election, no matter the cost. There was no Barlow Park upgrade in the budget and no Smithfield Mountain Bike Trail, but our government have committed to both projects. The member for Cairns never thought mountain biking was something to invest in, and this project fell on deaf ears for a decade. We have committed \$15½ million to the Smithfield Mountain Bike Park, and the project is well and truly on track. This will bring approximately \$100 million annually into the local economy when it is complete—a great investment for tourism. This is world-class infrastructure right on our doorstep and it attracts international visitors, supports local businesses and gives our community something to be proud of. It is exactly the kind of smart and strategic investment that delivers long-term results.

When I look across at what we have delivered locally, it is not one project. It is not one announcement. It is a pipeline of outcomes—upgrades to community infrastructure, support for local organisations, investment in safer roads and stronger services. Representation is not about turning up when it is easy; it is about persistence, it is about doing the work day in and day out—listening, persisting, delivering—and that is what I have always believed.

It is all about trust—that, when a government announces something, it will be delivered; trust that budgets are honest; trust that decisions are made with the long term in mind, not just the next election, because once trust is lost it is hard to rebuild. After a decade of Labor, Queenslanders have lost that trust and we are brick by brick rebuilding it calmly, methodically and responsibly.

Let me be clear: this is not about going backwards; this is about moving forward stronger, with better infrastructure, with stronger services and with a government that understands the responsibility it has to every Queenslander. Every dollar we spend is not government money; it is Queensland's money and it deserves respect. Yes, this bill reflects the mess we inherited, but it also reflects something else. It reflects the government willing to step up, take responsibility and fix it.

Debate, on motion of Ms James, adjourned.