



QUEENSLAND PARLIAMENT **COMMITTEES**

2024-25 Budget Estimates – Appropriation Bill 2024



Report No. 11, 57th Parliament
Health, Environment and Agriculture Committee
August 2024

Health, Environment and Agriculture Committee

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Acknowledgements

The committee thanks the Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services and Minister for Women; the Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, and Minister for Science and Innovation; and the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities. The committee also acknowledges the assistance provided by departmental officers during the estimates process.

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Statements of reservation

Chair's foreword

This report presents a summary of the committee's examination of the budget estimates for the 2024-25 financial year.

Consideration of the budget estimates allows for the public examination of the responsible Ministers and the chief executive officers of agencies within the committee's portfolio areas. This was undertaken through the questions on notice and public hearing process.

The committee has recommended that the proposed expenditure, as detailed in the Appropriation Bill 2024 for the committee's areas of responsibility, be agreed to by the Legislative Assembly without amendment.

On behalf of the committee, I thank the Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services and Minister for Women, the Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, and Minister for Science and Innovation, and the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities, and their departmental officers, for their co-operation in providing information to the committee throughout this process.

I would also like to thank the members of the committee for their hard work and valuable contribution to the estimates process, and other members whose participation in the hearing provided additional scrutiny of the estimates.

Finally, I thank the committee's secretariat and other Parliamentary Service staff for their assistance throughout the estimates process.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Aaron Harper'.

Aaron Harper MP
Chair

August 2024

1 Introduction

1.1 Role of the committee

The Health, Environment and Agriculture Committee (committee) is a portfolio committee of the Legislative Assembly which commenced on 13 February 2024 under the *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001* and the Standing Rules and Orders of the Legislative Assembly.¹

The committee's primary areas of responsibility are:

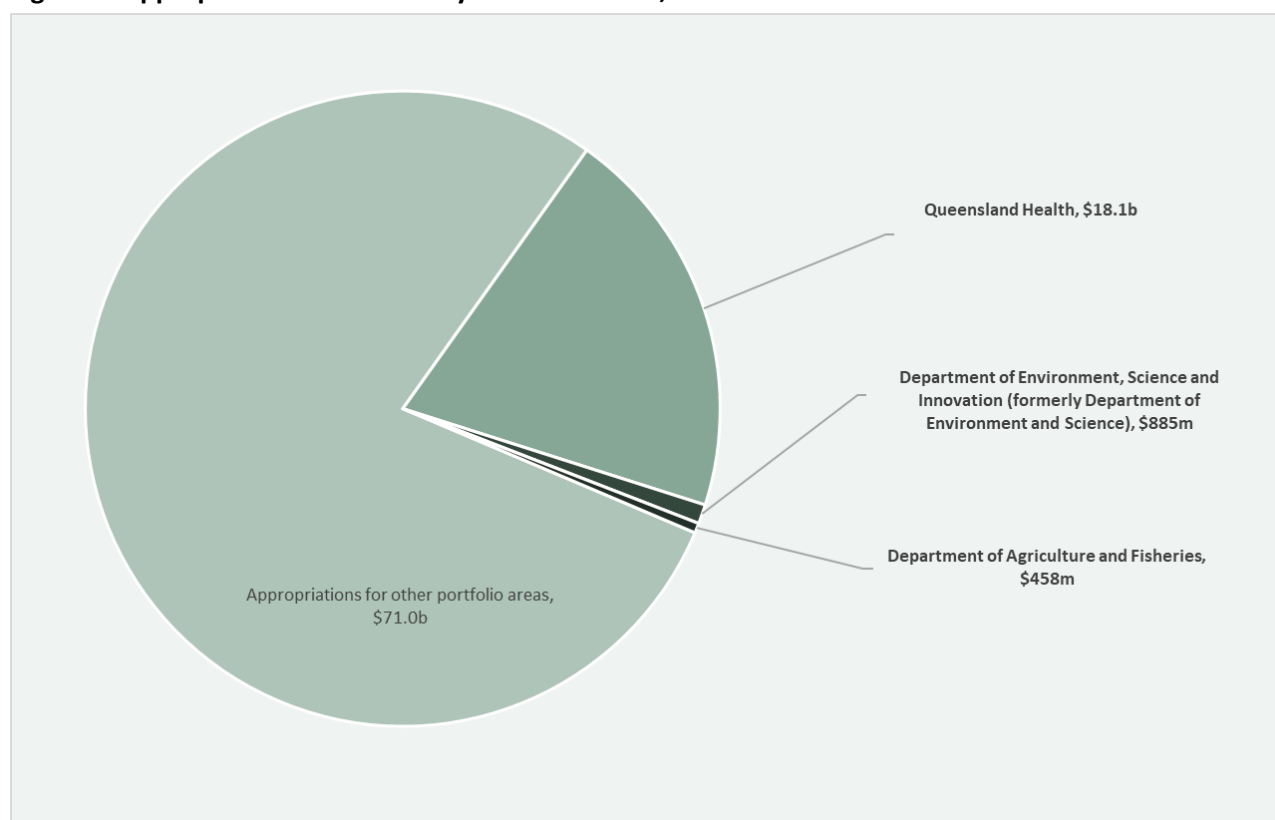
- Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services, and Women
- Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, and Science and Innovation
- Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries, and Rural Communities.

On 14 June 2024, the Appropriation Bill 2024 and the estimates for the committee's area of responsibility were referred to the committee for investigation and report.²

The estimates process is one of the key mechanisms to examine government expenditure, performance and effectiveness. By examining and reporting on the proposed expenditures contained in the Appropriation Bill the committee assists the Parliament in its scrutiny of the government's proposed expenditure.

The total 2024-25 Appropriation is \$90,436,181,000.³ The proposed expenditure in the committee's portfolio areas is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Appropriations examined by this committee, relative to total – 2024-25



Source: Data from Appropriation Bill 2024, Schedule 1.

¹ *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001*, s 88 and Standing Order 194.

² Standing Order 177 provides for the automatic referral of the Annual Appropriation Bills to portfolio committees once the Bills have been read a second time.

³ Appropriation Bill 2024, s 2.

The committee's examination of the Appropriation Bill 2024 is in relation to:

- Department of Health
- Hospital and Health Services
- Office of the Health Ombudsman
- The Council of the Queensland Institute of Medical Research
- Queensland Mental Health Commission
- Health and Wellbeing Queensland
- Office for Women
- Queensland Ambulance Service
- Department of Environment, Science and Innovation
- Department of Agriculture and Fisheries
- Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority.

On 25 July 2024, the committee conducted a public hearing and took evidence about the proposed expenditure from the Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services and Minister for Women; the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities; the Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, and Minister for Science and Innovation; and from other witnesses. The transcript of the committee's hearing is available on the committee's webpage.

1.2 Aim of this report

This report summarises the estimates referred to the committee and highlights some of the issues the committee examined.

The committee considered information contained in:

- budget papers
- answers to pre-hearing questions on notice
- evidence taken at the hearing
- additional information given in relation to answers.

Prior to the public hearing, the committee provided each Minister with questions on notice in relation to the estimates. Responses to all the questions were received.

Answers to pre-hearing questions on notice from the committee and crossbench Members, documents tabled during the hearing, and answers provided by Ministers after the hearing are included in a volume of additional information tabled with this report.

1.3 Participation by other Members

The following non-committee Members participated in the hearing with the leave of the committee:⁴

- Mr David Crisafulli MP, Leader of the Opposition and Member for Broadwater
- Ms Ros Bates MP, Member for Mudgeeraba
- Mr Jarrod Bleijie MP, Member for Kawana
- Ms Amanda Camm MP, Member for Whitsunday
- Mr Bryson Head MP, Member for Callide
- Mr Dale Last MP, Member for Burdekin
- Mr Ann Leahy MP, Member for Warrego
- Mr Tony Perrett MP, Member for Gympie

⁴ The Members for Maroochydore, Buderim and Glass House were also granted leave to participate.

- Mr Jimmy Sullivan MP, Member for Stafford.

The following non-committee Members of the crossbench gave notice of their intention to participate in the hearing in accordance with the Estimates 2024 motion agreed by the Legislative Assembly on 14 June 2024:

- Mr Michael Berkman MP, Member for Maiwar
- Dr Amy MacMahon MP, Member for South Brisbane.⁵

2 Recommendation

Pursuant to Standing Order 187(1), the committee must state whether the proposed expenditures referred to it are agreed to.

Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that the proposed expenditure, as detailed in the Appropriation Bill 2024 for the committee's areas of responsibility, be agreed to by the Legislative Assembly without amendment.

3 Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services and Minister for Women

The Honourable Shannon Fentiman MP, Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services and Minister for Women, is the Minister responsible for Queensland Health and the Office for Women.

Queensland Health is comprised of the Department of Health, the Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS), and 16 Hospital and Health Services (HHSs) across the state. The remainder of the Queensland Health portfolio includes the Office of the Health Ombudsman, Queensland Mental Health Commission, the Council of the Queensland Institute of Medical Research (QIMR Berghofer), and Health and Wellbeing Queensland.⁶

To assist the committee with its consideration of portfolio estimates, and in keeping with the requirements of Schedule 7 of the Standing Orders, the 16 Health Service chief executives, the Queensland Ambulance Service Commissioner, the Queensland Mental Health Commissioner, the Health Ombudsman, and the chief executives of QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute and Health and Wellbeing Queensland were present at the hearing on 25 July 2024.⁷

3.1 Queensland Health

The Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services and Minister for Women is responsible for Queensland Health.⁸ The Queensland Health budget encompasses:

- Department of Health
- QAS
- 16 HHSs situated throughout Queensland
- Queensland Mental Health Commission
- Office of the Health Ombudsman
- QIMR Berghofer
- Health and Wellbeing Queensland

⁵ Dr MacMahon gave notice by attending the hearing.

⁶ Queensland Budget, 2024-25, SDS, Queensland Health, p 1.

⁷ Schedule 7 of the Standing Orders sets out a list of statutory entities to which direct questioning of chief executives at estimates applies.

⁸ Queensland Budget, 2024-25, SDS, Queensland Health, p 1.

- Office for Women.

Queensland Health has 4 key objectives:

- Queenslanders have access to quality and safe healthcare and equitable health outcomes
- Queenslanders have overall improved health, a good start to life, healthy ageing and a good end of life experience
- Queensland has an innovative, connected, and sustainable health system
- the Queensland Health workforce is valued, respected, and empowered to lead the delivery of world-class health services each working at the top of their scope of practice.⁹

3.2 Department of Health

The Department of Health delivers health system governance, strategic leadership of the Queensland public health system, state-wide clinical health support services, information and communication technologies, health promotion and disease prevention strategy, urgent patient retrieval services, health infrastructure planning, and corporate support services for employing over 100,000 Queensland Health staff.

In 2024-25 the Department of Health plans to lead the capital program for infrastructure projects such as Satellite Hospitals, programs to deliver more hospital beds, and the Building Rural and Remote Health Program; develop a *Queensland Cancer Plan* to guide cancer care over the next 10 years; implement the *Research Strategy 2032* to build on and translate research to healthcare outcomes; implement midwife-to-patient ratios in maternity wards and legislative changes to improve access to termination of pregnancy services; and improve transparency of health system performance reporting.¹⁰

3.3 Queensland Ambulance Service

The QAS is the principal provider of pre-hospital emergency medical care and ambulance transport services in Queensland. The QAS delivers ambulance services across Queensland from 308 response locations, with services coordinated through 8 operations centres responsible for taking emergency calls, operational deployment and dispatch, and coordinating non-urgent patient transport services. QAS also incorporates Retrieval Services Queensland which coordinates all aeromedical retrieval and transport services, and the Health Contact Centre which provides 24/7 phone and online health assessment and information services.

Key deliverables for the QAS in 2024-25 include recruiting an additional 188 ambulance operatives; employing staff in 80 specialised positions in the QAS Clinical Hub and Falls Co-responder program; commencing planning, design and construction for the redevelopment of the Gold Coast Operations Centre at Coomera, planning for replacement of the Southport, Pimpama and Beenleigh Ambulance Stations, and relocation of the Springwood and Sandgate Ambulance Stations; and commissioning 155 new and replacement ambulance vehicles.¹¹

3.4 Hospital and Health Services

Information about each of the 16 HHS's key deliverables, performance (service standards and efficiency and effectiveness measures), staffing levels, and financial statements, is provided in *2024-25 Queensland State Budget - Service Delivery Statements - Queensland Health*.¹² Some key deliverables include:

- a new renal Haemodialysis Unit at Longreach (Central West HHS)
- improving patient access and flow through acute inpatient and specialist outpatient services, by implementing the *Kids First Patient Flow Improvement Program* at the Queensland Children's Hospital (Children's Health Queensland HHS)

⁹ Queensland Budget, 2024-25, SDS, Queensland Health, p 1.

¹⁰ Queensland Budget, 2024-25, SDS, Queensland Health, pp 21, 22.

¹¹ Queensland Budget, 2024-25, SDS, Queensland Health, p 32.

¹² Queensland Budget, 2024-25, SDS, Queensland Health, pp 37-149.

- promoting improvement in health outcomes and equity measures for First Nations peoples and communities through the *South West HHS First Nations Health Equity Strategy* (South West HHS)
- completion of the Thursday Island redevelopment project which will address ageing and functionally inadequate facilities at the hospital (Torres and Cape HHS)
- commencing the first CAR-T cell therapy service for cancer patients outside Brisbane (Townsville HHS).¹³

3.5 The Council of the Queensland Institute of Medical Research

The purpose of the Council of the Queensland Institute of Medical Research, known as QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute (QIMR Berghofer), is to achieve better health and wellbeing through impactful medical research. In 2024-25, QIMR Berghofer's key deliverables include increasing research translation and commercialisation of cell therapy products; progressing world-leading research into the causes, prevention, early diagnosis and treatment of cancer, and the establishment of research centres in the areas of tropical health and immunospatial tissue innovation; and advancing genetic, molecular, cellular, physiological, circuitry, cognitive, behavioural, and psychosocial research in mental and neurological disorders.¹⁴

3.6 Queensland Mental Health Commission

The Queensland Mental Health Commission's purpose is to drive reform towards an integrated, evidence-based, recovery-oriented mental health, alcohol and other drugs and suicide prevention system in the state.

In 2024-25, the Queensland Mental Health Commission will progress implementation of *Shifting Minds: The Queensland Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) and Suicide Prevention Strategic Plan 2023-2028* and *Achieving Balance: The Queensland Alcohol and Other Drugs Plan 2022-2027*. The Commission will also support the expansion and development of the lived experience (peer) workforce with particular focus on rural and remote areas and peer roles in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and the alcohol and other drugs peer workforce.¹⁵

3.7 Office of the Health Ombudsman

The purpose of the Office of the Health Ombudsman is to protect and support the community through responsive complaints processes and regulatory action to drive positive change and confidence in the health system. In 2024-25 the Office of the Health Ombudsman will track demand for its services focusing on barriers that might inhibit some population groups and communities from raising health service complaints, as well as implementing practices to improve the responsiveness and effectiveness of its complaint and regulatory functions.¹⁶

3.8 Health and Wellbeing Queensland

Health and Wellbeing Queensland is the state's prevention agency, with the purpose of working with the Queensland health system for systems change that addresses the preventable burden of disease. In 2024-25 Health and Wellbeing Queensland will lead implementation of the *Making Health Happen Action Plan 2024-2026* by 11 government agencies, to prevent, reduce and treat obesity across the system, and will develop the Queensland Mental Health and Wellbeing strategy in partnership with the Queensland Mental Health Commission. It will also implement its *Gather + Grow Queensland Remote Food Security Strategy 2023-2032* to help address food insecurity in remote communities.¹⁷

¹³ Queensland Budget, 2024-25, SDS, Queensland Health, pp 51, 58, 108, 122, 129.

¹⁴ Queensland Budget, 2024-25, SDS, Queensland Health, p 150.

¹⁵ Queensland Budget, 2024-25, SDS, Queensland Health, p 155.

¹⁶ Queensland Budget, 2024-25, SDS, Queensland Health, p 161.

¹⁷ Queensland Budget, 2023-24, SDS, Queensland Health, p 167.

3.9 Office for Women

The Office for Women promotes gender equality for women and girls, and leads and facilitates projects to support, promote and protect women’s rights, interests, leadership and wellbeing, with the aim of ensuring that women and girls across all cultures, backgrounds and age groups fully participate in the social, economic and broader community of Queensland.

In 2024-25 the Office for Women will work with other agencies across government to improve women’s economic security through supporting women in male dominated industries and programs to increase women’s participation in work. The Office for Women will also work with non-government organisations and communities through grants, sponsorships and partnerships to support gender equality.

3.10 Queensland Health budget overview

Queensland Health will receive the second largest budget appropriation from the 2024-25 State Budget, of \$18.134 billion.¹⁸

Total expenses in 2024-25 for Queensland Health, inclusive of the Department of Health and the HHSs, are estimated to be \$26.710 billion, which is an increase of \$2.558 billion (10.6 per cent) on the 2023–24 Budget. Queensland Health’s major assets are in property, plant and equipment (\$18.666 billion). Its main liabilities relate to employee benefits (\$1.662 billion) and payables of an operating nature (\$764 million).¹⁹

The following from the Appropriation Bill 2024 (Table 1) shows the combined total of the appropriations for Queensland Health for 2024-25, compared with the budgeted and actual appropriations for Queensland Health in 2023-24.

Table 1: Queensland Health appropriation for 2024-25

Appropriation	Budget 2023-24 \$'000	Est. Actual 2023-24 \$'000	Vote 2024-25 \$'000
<i>Controlled Items</i>			
departmental services	15,373,713	16,064,280	17,172,970
equity adjustment	502,175	819,324	871,841
<i>Administered Items</i>	57,055	78,292	88,887
Vote	15,932,943	16,961,896	18,133,698

Source: Appropriation Bill 2024, Schedule 2.

As highlighted in Table 1, the total combined 2024-25 appropriation of almost \$18.134 billion represents an increase of \$2.2 billion on last year’s budget appropriation, and approximately \$1.17 billion on the estimated actual expenditure by Queensland Health in 2023-24.

3.10.1 Trends in the Vote

Table 2 below shows the amount sought in 2024 for the Vote against spending over the previous 3 years.

¹⁸ Appropriation Bill 2024, Schedule 2, p 18.

¹⁹ Queensland Budget, 2024-25, SDS, Queensland Health, p 17.

Table 2: Trends in the appropriation for Queensland Health

	2021-22 Estimated Actual \$'000	2022-23 Estimated Actual \$'000	2023-24 Estimated Actual \$'000	2024-25 Estimates Sought \$'000
	12,707,944	15,343,008	16,961,896	18,133,698
% Change	20.7	10.55	6.9	

Source: Appropriation Bill 2022, Schedule 2, p 17; Appropriation Bill 2023, Schedule 2, p 16; Appropriation Bill 2024, Schedule 2, p 18.

3.10.2 Queensland Health budget highlights

The 2024-25 budget highlights²⁰ for Queensland Health include:

Addressing ongoing demand and cost pressures, improve access, and support other actions which include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> initiatives to address inequity in health and wellbeing outcomes for First Nations peoples recruitment of an additional 188 ambulance operatives and an additional 80 specialised positions programs to address health issues for women and girls, including implementing a statewide sexual assault response service free vaccinations through the Meningococcal B Vaccination Program and Paediatric Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) Prevention Program 	additional funding of \$4.393 billion over 4 years
Redeveloping the Cooktown Multi-Purpose Health Service facility, including culturally safe services	additional funding of \$200 million over 7 years
Additional capacity for clinical services at Cairns Health and Innovation Centre, within the existing Cairns Hospital Precinct	additional funding of \$60 million over 2 years
Replacing existing staff accommodation in Torres and Cape Hospital	funding of \$12 million in 2024–25
Increasing the Queensland Ambulance Service's capital program	increased funding of \$30 million in 2024-25

3.10.3 Queensland Health capital program

In 2024–25, Queensland Health's total capital investment in built infrastructure and digital technologies is \$2.167 billion.

Hospital and health facility projects for 2024-25 include:

- \$1.152 billion for the Capacity Expansion Program to improve patient flow, reduce wait times and deliver additional hospital beds in the new Bundaberg, Toowoomba and Coomera hospitals, the new Queensland Cancer Centre, and at 11 hospital expansions (including Brisbane, Cairns, Fraser Coast, Gold Coast, Ipswich, Logan, Mackay, Moreton Bay, Robina, Toowoomba, and Townsville)
- \$60 million over 2 years from 2024-25 for the Cairns Health and Innovation Centre
- \$8 million in 2024–25 to redevelop the Cooktown Multi-Purpose Health Service facility which will increase bed numbers by 50 per cent (part of planned \$200 million project expenditure over 7 years)
- \$66.7 million for Mental Health Alcohol and Other Drug Services – *Better Care Together* plan

²⁰ Queensland Budget, 2024-25, SDS, Queensland Health, p 3.

- \$215 million for Department of Health and HHS capital projects, rural and regional health facilities and staff accommodation, and Ripley and Gold Coast University Hospital sub acute expansions
- \$59.4 million for the Building Better Hospitals program (includes Caboolture Hospital Redevelopment, Ipswich and Logan Hospitals expansions, and Logan Hospital Maternity Services Upgrade)
- \$6.6 million to finalise the Satellite Hospitals Program and to deliver additional chemotherapy services to Bribie Island Satellite Hospital
- ICT investment of \$97.8 million
- \$99.5 million for QAS infrastructure including:
 - \$27.7 million for planning and construction of new and replacement ambulance stations
 - \$39.8 million for 155 new and replacement ambulances, including the continued rollout of power assisted stretchers and fit out of emergency response vehicles.²¹

3.11 Matters raised during the estimates process

Matters raised during the committee's examination of the estimates for the Queensland Health portfolio entities including the Office for Women are listed below.²²

Matters considered in relation to the estimates for the Health, Mental Health, Ambulance Services, and Women portfolio	Pre-hearing questions on notice
The financial position and performance of Queensland's Hospital and Health Services	1, 19
Funding allocated for the implementation of integrated electronic medical records and the timing of their roll-out	2
Projects to be funded through the Capacity Expansion Program and their anticipated impact on patient flows	3, 11
Ambulances services, including meal penalties for crew, 'Finish on Time Performance', ambulance 'lost time' and measures to support performance	4-6, 20
Waiting lists for cochlear implants	7
Maternity care, including the number and length of maternity service suspensions and measures to boost services	8, 17
Investigations relating to alleged misconduct by Queensland Health staff	9
The cost of inventory write-offs from expired RAT tests and vaccines	10
Measures to address occupational violence in the health system	12
Operation of the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme	13
Mental health services and funding, including allocation of funding from the Mental Health Levy	14 Crossbench (South Brisbane)

²¹ Queensland Budget, 2024-25, SDS, Queensland Health, pp 15-16.

²² List is not exhaustive. For all matters considered see the public hearing transcript, 25 July 2024.

Management of patients who should be in aged or disability care and impacts on the health system	15
Measures to enhance patient safety	16
Management of demand for elective surgeries	18
Funding for hospices	Crossbench (Noosa)
The provision of opioid substitution therapy	Crossbench (Maiwar)
	Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 25 July 2024, page no:
Ambulance ramping and response times, including availability of performance data, causes and measures to reduce ramping	4-5, 7, 9, 43-45, 49-51
Waiting lists – elective surgery, specialist outpatients	5, 7
Emergency departments – measures of performance, investments to improve performance and reduce demand	6, 8, 10, 46
Satellite hospitals	10
Major strategies, including the Health Workforce Strategy and 10-year cancer strategy	11-12
Staff numbers, including number of nurses and psychologists, staff numbers at certain sites, number of staff receiving certain training	13, 20, 36, 38, 39, 41, 45
Ward configurations at the Queensland Children's Hospital	14-15
Part 9 investigations, including in relation to the voluntary assisted dying unit, the mental health adult inpatient unit at the Prince Charles Hospital, and the Torres and Cape Hospital and Health Service	16-19, 23-25, 35
Hospital beds – numbers and investments	21-23
Media training for executive staff	25-27
Progress of nurse-led clinics	28-29
Drug testing (pill testing)	29-30
Progress of the Women and Girls' Health Strategy	30-31
Role of input from frontline healthcare workers and patients in policy development	32
Availability of performance data	33-34

Maternity services	37, 39
Staff accommodation	38
Women's economic security	40
Heart attack survival rates	41-42
Investments in ambulance service infrastructure and capacity	46-48

4 Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, and Minister for Science and Innovation

The Honourable Leanne Linard MP, Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, and Minister for Science and Innovation has responsibility for the Department of Environment, Science and Innovation.

4.1 Department of Environment, Science and Innovation

The Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, and Minister for Science and Innovation is responsible for the Department of Environment, Science and Innovation (DESI).

As part of the machinery-of-government changes made on 18 December 2023, the former Department of Environment and Science was renamed the Department of Environment, Science and Innovation with changes to its functions. Figures in this report for the 2024-25 budget and the 2023-24 estimated actuals are presented on a post-machinery-of-government basis.²³

DESI's objectives are to:

- conserve and restore Queensland's unique biodiversity, heritage and protected areas
- grow the circular economy
- protect World Heritage areas including the Great Barrier Reef
- drive economic transition and innovation
- strengthen and harness Queensland's scientific excellence
- deliver a world class environmental, heritage and biodiscovery regulatory system.²⁴

DESI has 5 service areas:

- Environmental Programs and Regulation Services
- Parks, Wildlife and Conservation Services
- Science Services
- Heritage Protection Services
- Advancing Queensland through Innovation.

4.2 Department budget overview

DESI will receive a budget appropriation from the 2024-25 Queensland Budget of \$885 million.²⁵

²³ Climate functions were transferred to the Department of Energy and Climate; the Brisbane 2032 team was transferred to the Department of State Development and Infrastructure; Multicultural Affairs was transferred to the Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services; and Innovation was received from the Department of Tourism and Sport (Queensland Budget, 2024-25, SDS, Department of Environment, Science and Innovation, p 1.)

²⁴ Queensland Budget, 2024-25, SDS, Department of Environment, Science and Innovation, p 1.

²⁵ Appropriation Bill 2024, Schedule 2, p 11.

DESI's total expenses for 2024-25 is estimated to be \$1.069 billion, which is an increase of \$161.9 million from estimated actual departmental spending in 2023-24. The total revenue for 2024-25 is \$1.065 billion, an increase of \$158.6 million from 2023-24 estimated actual revenue. The increases in total expenses and total revenue are reported as being primarily due to planned expenditure on, and additional funding for, programs including Advanced Queensland, reef protection, Queensland Quantum and Advanced Technologies Strategy and Queensland Quantum Academy, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service's Fire Management Uplift program, managing Country with First Nations peoples, SEQ City Deal, natural disaster resilience and remediation, and the effects of machinery-of-government transfers.²⁶

DESI is estimated to receive administered income in 2024-25 of \$462.9 million, which is an increase of \$29.3 million from 2023-24 estimated actuals, primarily due to higher revenue from an increase in regulated waste levy rates from 1 July 2024.²⁷

DESI's net assets are projected to be worth \$6.468 billion in 2024-25 (total assets of \$6.5 billion offset by liabilities of \$32 million). Asset balances are comprised primarily of heritage and cultural land held as national parks (\$1.887 billion), land (\$631.6 million), infrastructure (\$3.310 billion), buildings (\$304.7 million), plant and equipment including intangibles (\$107.9 million) and financial assets representing investments (\$95.1 million). The 2024-25 asset balances include the 2024-25 capital acquisitions program of \$102.2 million, \$68.3 million for land, buildings and infrastructure, \$27.8 million for plant and equipment, and \$6.1 million for systems development.²⁸

The following from the Appropriation Bill 2024 (Table 3) shows the total appropriation for DESI for 2024-25, compared with the 2023-24 budgeted and actual appropriations.

Table 3: Department of Environment, Science and Innovation appropriation for 2024-25

Appropriation	Budget 2023-24 \$'000	Est. Actual 2023-24 \$'000	Vote 2024-25 \$'000
<i>Controlled Items</i>			
departmental services	735,848	670,464	803,765
equity adjustment	53,501	107,920	81,281
<i>Administered Items</i>
Vote	789,349	778,384	885,046

Source: Appropriation Bill 2024, Schedule 2.

As highlighted in Table 3, the total 2024-25 appropriation of \$885 million represents an increase of approximately \$95.7 million on last year's budget appropriation, and \$106.7 million on the estimated actual departmental spending in 2023-24.

4.2.1 Trends in the Vote

Table 4 below shows the amount sought in 2024 for the Vote against spending over the previous 3 years.

²⁶ Queensland Budget, 2024-25, SDS, Department of Environment, Science and Innovation, p 12. The controlled income statement includes 2023-24 budget and estimated actuals information presented on a post-machinery-of-government change basis.

²⁷ Queensland Budget, 2024-25, SDS, Department of Environment, Science and Innovation, p 12. The administered income statement includes 2023-24 budget and estimated actuals information presented on a post-machinery-of-government change basis.

²⁸ Queensland Budget, 2024-25, SDS, Department of Environment, Science and Innovation, p 12.

Table 4: Trends in the appropriation for the Department of Environment and Science

	2021-22 Estimated Actual \$'000	2022-23 Estimated Actual \$'000	2023-24 Estimated Actual \$'000	2024-25 Estimates Sought \$'000
	1,350,298	683,160	778,384	885,046
% Change	(49.4)	13.9	13.7 ²⁹	

Source: Appropriation Bill 2022, Schedule 2, p 10; Appropriation Bill 2023, Schedule 2, p 10; Appropriation Bill 2024, Schedule 2, p 11.

4.2.2 Department budget highlights

The 2024-25 budget highlights³⁰ for DESI include:

Continuing delivery of 10-year \$2.1 billion Waste Package	\$247.8 million over 5 years
Developing and delivering the <i>Queensland Quantum and Advanced Technologies Strategy</i> and Queensland Quantum Academy	\$89.7 million over 5 years
Increasing Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service's fire management capacity and capability to effectively manage wildfire risk	\$39.2 million in 2024-25
Continuing planned actions under the <i>South East Queensland Koala Conservation Strategy 2020–25</i>	\$31.3 million over 4 years and \$8.4 million per annum ongoing
Supporting the conservation of dingoes (wongari) and management of public safety on K'gari	\$29.2 million over 5 years and \$3 million ongoing
Continuing implementation of the <i>Threatened Species Program 2020-2040</i>	\$23.5 million over 4 years and \$6.3 million per annum ongoing
Developing 3 pilot bioregional plans focussed on renewable energy, critical minerals and urban development	\$2 million over 2 years

4.2.3 Department capital program

DESI's 2024-25 capital program includes upgrades of visitor infrastructure in Whitsunday Islands National Park, Girraween National Park and on K'gari, fire management and waste programs, as well as land acquisitions and capital works to expand and conserve protected areas.

Capital purchases for DESI in 2024-25 total \$154.1 million.

The government previously set aside \$250 million over 4 years, held centrally, for the *Protected Area Strategy 2020-2030*, \$139.1 million of which will go towards land acquisitions in 2024-25 and 2025-26.

The capital program will also include \$18.1 million for Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service's Fire Management program, and capital grants of \$51.9 million, including \$36.4 million for waste, recycling and resource recovery capital grants.³¹

²⁹ Estimated actuals between 2023-24 and 2024-25 are not directly comparable due to machinery-of-government changes on 18 December 2023.

³⁰ Queensland Budget, 2024-25, SDS, Department of Environment, Science and Innovation, p 2.

³¹ Queensland Budget, 2024-25, SDS, Department of Environment, Science and Innovation, p 11.

4.3 Matters raised during the estimates process

Matters raised during the committee's examination of the estimates for the Environment, the Great Barrier Reef, Science, and Innovation portfolio are listed below.³²

Matters considered in relation to the estimates for the Environment, the Great Barrier Reef, Science, and Innovation portfolio	Pre-hearing questions on notice
World-Class Protected Area Management – funding expended to date and details of projects	1
Species protection, including koala protection and spending on certain programs	2, 17
Waste management and reduction, including access to the Food Organic Garden Organic (FOGO) kerbside collection service, the status of the Waste strategy review, delivery of the Waste Package, and the phase out the use of single-use plastic items	3, 6, 13, 15 Crossbench (Maiwar)
Establishment and operation of the aquaculture working group	4
Spending on Newstead House works	6
Staff attrition	7
Support to emerging industries and the science industry, including delivery of the Advance Queensland Roadmap and associated spending	8, 19, 20
National parks and other protected areas, including hand-backs to traditional owners, expansions, and funding for environmental management	9, 10, 11 Crossbench (Noosa)
Measures to reduce negative interactions with native wildlife, specifically wongari (dingoes) on K'Gari	12
Great Barrier Reef – improving water quality	14
Delivery of bioregional planning	16
Management of environmental risks in administration of the <i>Environmental Protection Act 1994</i>	18
	Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 25 July 2024, page no:
Progress towards environmental protection targets, including acquisition of new areas for protection	89-93, 99-100
Environmental impact of the Pioneer-Burdekin Pumped Hydro project	95

³² List is not exhaustive. For all matters considered see the public hearing transcript, 25 July 2024.

Waste management, reduction and recycling, including phasing out single-use plastics	97, 102-105
Tentative World Heritage listing for parts of Cape York Peninsula	98-99
Progress in emissions reduction	106
Quantum strategy, industry support and investment	108-110
PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances)	111-112, 116-117
Support for innovation and scientific research, including engagement of First Nations peoples in biodiscovery	112-115, 117-122

5 Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities

The Honourable Mark Furner MP, Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities has responsibility for the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and Queensland Rural Industry Development Authority (QRIDA).³³

To assist the committee with its consideration of portfolio estimates, and in keeping with the requirements of Schedule 7 of the Standing Orders, the chief executive of QRIDA was present at the hearing on 25 July 2024.³⁴

5.1 Department of Agriculture and Fisheries

The Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities is responsible for the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF).

DAF has 3 service areas:

- Enabling Agriculture Industry Growth
- Queensland Biosecurity Services
- Fisheries and Forestry Industry Development.

The objectives of these service areas are to:

- enable Queensland's agrisystem to grow by delivering innovative research, policy and support services that support sustainable food and fibre prosperity
- mitigate the risks and impacts of animal and plant pests and diseases and weeds to the economy, the environment, social amenity, and human health, and uphold standards for animal welfare and agricultural chemical use in line with community expectations
- ensure sustainable, high-value fisheries and fishing experiences and the responsible management and use of state-owned timber and quarry resources.³⁵

³³ Queensland Budget, 2024-25, SDS, Queensland Health, p 1.

³⁴ Schedule 7 of the Standing Orders sets out a list of statutory entities to which direct questioning of chief executives at estimates applies.

³⁵ Queensland Budget, 2024-25, SDS, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, pp 3, 4, 5.

5.2 Department budget overview

DAF will receive a budget appropriation from the 2024-25 State Budget of \$458.6 million.³⁶

Total expenses estimated for 2024-25, at \$714.9 million, is a decrease of \$146.6 million on DAF's estimated actual expenditure in 2023-24. According to the DAF Service Delivery Statements, the decrease is mostly due to budget allocations being held centrally by government for the implementation of the Future Fisheries reforms and to meet Queensland's obligations under the National Biosecurity System. Also contributing to the decrease in expenditure are a planned reduction in national cost sharing arrangements for the Electric Ants and Four Tropical Weeds eradication programs (\$7.2 million); decreased research and development contracts with external funders (\$17.6 million); and various limited life projects nearing completion, including the Drought Preparedness Grants Scheme (\$13 million) and the Australian Government funded Horticultural Netting Program (\$6.4 million - now administered through QRIDA).³⁷

These reductions are partly offset by additional funding in 2024-25 for other initiatives, including funds for invasive species management and to promote responsible dog ownership and implement stronger dog laws.

The estimated \$71 million in administered expenses is similar to the 2023-24 estimated actual (\$70 million) but a decrease from the 2023-24 budget figure (\$81.5 million), which is mainly associated with lower demand than anticipated for grant funding provided to QRIDA for the Australian Government's North Queensland Restocking, Replanting and On-farm Infrastructure Grant Program.³⁸

DAF's net assets are estimated to be worth \$626 million in 2024-25, with total assets of \$801 million offset by liabilities of \$175 million. The department's assets are primarily in property, plant and equipment with the DAF having facilities located throughout rural and regional Queensland.³⁹

The following table from the Appropriation Bill 2024 (Table 5) shows the combined total of the appropriations for DAF for 2024-25, compared with the 2023-24 budgeted and actual appropriations.

Table 5: Department of Agriculture and Fisheries appropriation for 2024-25

Appropriation	Budget 2023-24 \$'000	Est. Actual 2023-24 \$'000	Vote 2024-25 \$'000
<i>Controlled Items</i>			
departmental services	368,861	453,618	406,474
equity adjustment	(1,616)	(8,307)	3,778
<i>Administered Items</i>	79,724	67,705	48,395
Vote	446,969	513,016	458,647

Source: Appropriation Bill 2024, Schedule 2.

As highlighted in Table 5, the total combined 2024-25 appropriation of \$458.6 million is an increase of approximately \$12 million on last year's budget appropriation, but a decrease of \$54 million on the estimated actual expenditure by DAF in 2023-24.

5.2.1 Trends in the Vote

Table 6 shows the amount sought in 2024-25 for the Vote against spending over the previous 3 years.

³⁶ Appropriation Bill 2024, Schedule 2, p 9.

³⁷ Queensland Budget, 2024-25, SDS, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, p 10.

³⁸ Queensland Budget, 2024-25, SDS, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, p 10.

³⁹ Queensland Budget, 2024-25, SDS, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, p 12.

Table 6: Trends in the appropriation for the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries

	2021-22 Estimated Actual \$'000	2022-23 Estimated Actual \$'000	2023-24 Estimated Actual \$'000	2024-25 Estimates Sought \$'000
	383,373	419,872	513,016	458,647
% Change	9.5	22.2	(10.6)	

Source: Appropriation Bill 2022, Schedule 2, p 8; Appropriation Bill 2023, Schedule 2, p 9; Appropriation Bill 2024, Schedule 2, p 9.

5.2.2 Department budget highlights

The 2024-25 budget highlights⁴⁰ for DAF include:

Invasive species management and workforce training through the Backing Bush Communities Fund	\$20 million over 4 years
Promoting responsible dog ownership and supporting implementation of stronger dog laws	\$7.3 million over 5 years
Strengthening DAF leadership in state and national biosecurity systems including prosecutorial, enforcement, investigative and intelligence capabilities	\$6.5 million over 4 years and \$1.6 million per annum ongoing
Round 7 of the Rural Economic Development Grants program	\$3.3 million in 2024–25
Facilitating collective action to manage Varroa destructor	Additional \$2.4 million over 3 years

5.2.3 Department capital program

Capital purchases of \$28.5 million are planned by DAF in 2024-25 for various projects to develop and upgrade infrastructure. Significant capital projects in 2024-25 include \$5.1 million for new and replacement computer hardware; \$4 million to finalise long-term decisions on the future of assets formerly held by the Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges; \$3.2 million for infrastructure for the Building Resilience to Manage Fruit Fly Project at Redlands Research Centre; \$2.3 million to continue upgrading research facilities; \$2.0 million for new and replacement heavy plant and equipment; \$1.6 million to upgrade the Wild Dog Barrier Fence; and \$1.4 million to upgrade infrastructure and equipment at Gatton Smart Farm.

DAF's 2024–25 budget also provides a capital grant of \$100,000 to contribute to the upgrade of adoption facilities at the Young Animal Protection Society in Cairns.⁴¹

5.3 Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority

The Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities also has responsibility for QRIDA, a statutory body with the purpose of fostering productive and sustainable regions and rural communities for a thriving and financially resilient Queensland.⁴²

5.3.1 QRIDA budget overview

A budget surplus of \$27.3 million for QRIDA is anticipated for 2024–25, mainly as a result of interest income exceeding finance/borrowing expenses.

⁴⁰ Queensland Budget, 2024-25, SDS, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, p 2.

⁴¹ Queensland Budget, 2024-25, SDS, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, p 9.

⁴² Queensland Budget, 2024-25, SDS, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, p 9.

According to the DAF Service Delivery Statements, lower grant income (\$83.5 million) and grant expenses (\$92.1 million) for 2024-25 compared to 2023-24, are due to QRIDA's 2024-25 Budget being based on known schemes, and changes may occur later.

The 2023-24 estimated actual grant income is significantly higher (by \$207.1 million) than forecast in the 2023-24 Budget due to the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements grants required for events which occurred during the financial year and the extension of grants from the prior year, as well as new schemes relating to fishing and energy. Grant expenses were also higher (by \$141.1 million) than 2023-24 Budget due to these schemes, although lower than estimated demand for the Australian Government's North Queensland Restocking, Replanting and On-farm Infrastructure Grant Program partially offset expenses.⁴³

5.3.2 QRIDA capital program

As an organisation primarily engaged in the administration of financial assistance programs, no capital statement is included in the 2024-25 DAF Service Delivery Statements for QRIDA.

5.4 Matters raised during the estimates process

Matters raised during the committee's examination of the estimates for the Agricultural Industry Development, Fisheries and Rural Communities portfolio, including QRIDA, are listed below.⁴⁴

Matters considered in relation to the estimates for the Agricultural Industry Development, Fisheries and Rural Communities portfolio	Pre-hearing questions on notice
Fisheries, including commercial fishing licenses in the Mary River, the sustainable fisheries strategy, the importance of the WTO to fisheries, and commercial fishing license buy-backs	1, 19, 20 Crossbench (Noosa)
Staff allocations for certain services areas and programs, and the locations where staff are based	2, 3
Fire ants, including detection, treatment, and the National Fire Ant Eradication program	4, 8, 18
Funding for biosecurity projects and programs, including in relation to cattle ticks and fire ants	5
Details of approved projects forming part of the capital program for the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries in 2023-24	6
Spending for the 2022-23 and 2023-24 financial years to directly combat certain animal and plant diseases	7
Financial incentives provided through the GRASS program for beef producers	9
Operation and outcomes of the Reef Credit Scheme	10
Support to the rural economy	11
Support to the agricultural industry to assist in achieving climate change targets	12
Drought status of the state and provision of drought assistance	13, 14

⁴³ Queensland Budget, 2024-25, SDS, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, p 20.

⁴⁴ List is not exhaustive. For all matters considered see the public hearing transcript, 25 July 2024.

Agri-science arrangements with external providers	15
Agri-tech innovations and benefits to Queensland	16
Requirements associated with a General Biosecurity Obligation	17
Queensland's Shark Control Program, including impact on whales	Crossbench (Maiwar)
	Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 25 July 2024, page no:
Repurposing of Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges, including associated tender processes	54-57, 70
Staff allocations, including in regional and rural areas and to certain programs	57, 62
Fire ants	59, 63
Investment in and support of rural communities	58, 60
Animal diseases and pests, including cattle ticks and lumpy skin disease	66-67
Disaster assistance	68-69, 75
Timber industry, including the Queensland Sustainable Timber Industry Framework and trends in the supply, demand and importation of timber	70-75, 80-81
Queensland's Shark Control Program, including impact on whales	76-77
Recreational fishing	78-79, 85-86
Commercial fishing, including phasing out of gill-nets, Spanish mackerel stock assessment	81-84
Sustainable Fisheries Strategy	84-85

Statements of reservation

Statement of Reservation – Health, Environment and Agriculture Committee

Introduction

Opposition members of the Committee agree with the passing of the 2024/25 Budget but acknowledge its clear limitations.

It is a matter of regret that the Estimates process has, once again, been characterised by obfuscation, concealment rather than transparency and the triumph of the opaque over the crystal clear.

At the conclusion of nearly a decade in office, and at the end of the first four year parliamentary term, the government has failed to provide reassurance that its policies are meeting the significant challenges that face the state – the cost of living crisis, the health crisis, the crime crisis and the housing crisis.

The band aid solutions outlined in the Budget fail to address the underlying causes behind these challenges. Simply directing scarce government funds at problems – many of which are the direct result of government action or inaction – will not provide the long term solutions that are required.

The Budget provided a chance for the government to chart a new direction, to discard the errors of the past and reassure Queenslanders that problems will be met head on. Unfortunately, there is no evidence that this is occurring.

Unless the government faces that economic challenges that confront the state there is little prospect other underlying problems will be overcome. The Estimates process has revealed just how unprepared the government is to meet its responsibilities to help Queenslanders.

Health, Ambulance Services and Women

The Queensland Health crisis continues to deepen under a tired, third term Labor Government. This was evidenced clearly throughout the hearing dedicated to the Health Portfolio. The Opposition has maintained a strong emphasis on the failures of the Miles Government in its management of the Queensland public health system.

It is no secret that Queensland has world class doctors, nurses, paramedics and allied health professionals, but they are horribly let down by a government who no longer listens to them – and they haven't been listening for a long time.

The night before the Committee's hearing Minister released only some of the hospital performance data for the June Quarter. Unbelievably, despite spending three quarters of a billion dollars last year to 'tackle' ambulance ramping over the past financial year, ramping remains at nearly 45% across Queensland. With this sobering outcome, it effectively means Queensland has endured the worst six months of ambulance ramping on record.

The Minister had committed to reducing ambulance ramping to 28% in the 12 months following taking over the portfolio. Not only has the target not been met, ramping is actually worse.

This is having fatal consequences, with the Queensland Ambulance Service Commissioner confirming that slower ambulance response times are clearly linked to an increase in the number of people dying from a heart attack. That was a startling revelation to come from the hearing which proves that the Queensland Health Crisis is only getting worse under Labor.

The Minister also refused to release performance data for elective surgery and specialist outpatient services, the first time the quarterly data has been split up in such a way. The LNP can only assume this was done to avoid scrutiny at the hearing and follows a trend of similar behaviour by the Minister in being evasive with the data outlining the performance of the hospital system.

Other issues canvassed throughout the hearing included the number of Part 9 investigations that had taken place across the year, struggling regional maternity services, a lack of availability for forensic testing for women subject to sexual assault, diminishing elective surgery performance at the Rockhampton Hospital.

Agricultural Industry Development/Rural Communities

The Opposition remains concerned about the government's decision to sell off Queensland's Agricultural Colleges. Concerns were raised that the successful tender for the former Longreach site went to a proponent who was not going to continue the educational component of the site. At a time skills and labour shortages continue to cripple Queensland's agricultural industries, this remains a significant concern.

Concerns were raised about the Minister's ability to effectively engage with the Health Minister on the issues pertinent to rural communities, in line with the Minister's ministerial charter. This is in addition to serious concerns with the government's bungled approach to the Fire Ant Eradication Program.

Fisheries and Forestry

The government failed to detail any further information or funding following their announcement for a Sustainable Timber Industry Framework. The Opposition remains concerned about the government's ability to deliver on what they have committed to, given the same government's 2019 commitment to a two-year action plan to be delivered by 2021, a commitment that has never been delivered.

The Opposition also pressed the government on their failures surrounding fisheries stock assessment transparency, and compensation packages for industry. It is clear this is a policy area the government lacks interest and understanding in, and as such, the industry continues to suffer.

Environment, Great Barrier Reef, Science and Innovation

Once again this Government demonstrated they are more interested in announcements than action when it comes to protecting Queensland's environment. The Hearings confirmed there is no goal for when the Government plans to hit their 17% protected area target, set almost a decade ago by Premier Miles, then Environment Minister. It explains why there has been less than a per cent increase in the protected area estate since 2015.

The Government continues to under-invest in expanding the private protected area estate, with little support given to private landholders each year, minimising the effectiveness of this program. With around 50 cents a hectare allocated to fund the management of this estate it is little surprise the Government is not making more headway toward their target.

The hoax of Pioneer Burdekin continued with the environmental impact statement not even commenced to date. Worse still, despite making the commitment last year to visit the proposed site at Eungella the Minister has not followed through.

The popper saga continued with the Minister having to admit there is still no facility in Queensland to recycle poppers. Last year assurances were made they were being recycled appropriately by the

company they were being sent to in India, despite the Minister being unable to provide any evidence this was the case. Now, for no reason given, they are being sent to Spain. It is the height of spin over substance that this Government would do an entire advertising campaign to get people to return poppers for recycling while having no facility to do so. Millions of poppers have now been shipped overseas with little due diligence on what happens to them.

Remarkably, the Department who manages the Quantum Strategy has had no involvement in the significant investment decision (almost half a billion dollars) into PsiQuantum. This was unable to be explained, with the Department with the most expertise in the field seemingly excluded from the decision.

Conclusion

These hearings have revealed many shortcomings in the government's policies and little evidence that the government knows how to overcome these.

Effective service delivery comes a distant second in competing with political objectives and Queenslanders continue to be let down. There was little evidence provided over the course of Estimates that the government has a clear, coherent plan to overcome the significant problems facing the state.

Of equal concern was the government's failure to deliver public projects on budget and on time.

No evidence emerged during these hearings that the government has any capacity to overcome the continuing state of chaos and crisis that has characterised so much of the past decade.

This Budget is a wasted opportunity and Queenslanders have been ignored by the government.



Rob Molhoek MP
Deputy Chair
Member for Southport



Sam O'Connor MP
Member for Bonney

Statement of Reservation – Health, Environment and Agriculture Committee

It became very apparent through this Estimates process that the government has embarked on a state-wide energy transition without any comprehensive modelling, rigorous business case, cost-benefit analysis or environmental impact assessment on the many social, economic and environmental impacts it will have.

Queenslanders are currently facing a number of serious challenges, including a severe cost of living crisis and crippling housing crisis. Despite this, the Government seems absolutely determined to ramp up its so-called 'transition' of the state from a fossil-fuel based economy to one powered by renewables.

This Budget should have been an opportunity for the government to recognise the enormous pressures households and businesses in Queensland, particularly in the regions, are under and to have responded accordingly.

Unfortunately, there was no indication in these Hearings that they are even listening to ordinary Queenslanders at this point, much less responding to their concerns.

Instead, Labor is just forging ahead, without any modelling or studies being carried out on the enormous impact its legislated target of 75 percent by 2035 will have on the day to day lives of ordinary Queenslanders, farmers, small business and many other sectors of our economy.

It was extremely disappointing to have so many of my questions at the hearing met with feigned incomprehension and a complete refusal to acknowledge, let alone address, any of the concerns I raised in relation to the roll-out of renewables across Central and North Queensland.

The Pioneer-Burdekin Pumped Hydro Project, which underpins Labor's green energy transition has already cost taxpayers \$136 million, and yet the Minister was still unable to provide me with any estimate as to the project's final cost.

And only after much prompting did the Environment Minister admit that the Pioneer- Project has still not had any Biodiversity or Environmental Impact Studies done on the impact it will have on the environment and the many endangered and vulnerable species that live there.

The Minister and her departmental staff seemed confused by the idea that other renewable projects, like the enormously destructive wind farms being built in my area, might also require Environmental Impact Studies to be carried out.

Eventually, the department finally admitted that these are not required by their office and that everything to do with the erection of these huge, industrial-grade renewable projects is the sole responsibility of Queensland's Planning Minister.

This is perplexing given the Environment department's zeal in pursuing environmental studies for just about every other sector of the Queensland economy.

Such an attitude is unlikely to inspire much confidence in the communities where huge amounts of remnant vegetation and vulnerable species' habitat are being cleared, to make way for all these gigantic steel turbines and solar panels.

Overall, the Estimates hearings shed very little light on where the state is headed with this 'green energy transition' and I was left with the distinct impression that the whole thing has become a 'destination without a roadmap' at this point.

Of course, there were lots of promises about Queensland becoming a 'renewables superpower', but zero detail on how this will happen or at what cost – whether economic or environmental.

The whole roll-out seems chaotic and haphazard.

The government appears to have done no statewide stocktake to determine exactly what renewables projects need to be built, or where.

Queenslanders deserve much better than this shambolic free for all when it comes to the carpeting of the regions with giant renewable projects.

The Environment portfolio, in particular, appears to have completely abrogated its responsibility when it comes to the whole program and for the most part seem to be standing back and letting the whole thing just happen.

And if they're not looking at the environmental impacts, then nobody in government is.

The Estimates process also revealed that nothing is being done by either the Agriculture Minister or his department in terms of addressing the many problems and pressures facing our food producers right now.

There was nothing in the Budget for farmers.

Capital purchases and grants for the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, are a measly \$28.5 million for 2024-25.

It's unbelievable how this government has treated the state's food producers over the past decade.

In 1991, there were 276,000 farmers in Australia.

Today there are 83,000.

That's all that's left and those that are left are barely hanging on right now.

In response to my questions, the Minister could only recite a few low-cost biosecurity programs, several climate resilience projects and a whole host of 'band-aid' solutions, none of which will even come close to mitigating the enormous challenges facing farmers and other food producers in Queensland today.

Having questioned ministers and officials throughout the Estimates process, I do not believe there is any real awareness on the part of government, of the significant problems facing Queenslanders today.

Or that, no matter how many billions, or even trillions, they throw at this so-called 'transition', the reality is we are destroying all our existing capital and strength, and replacing it with something that is much less productive, less efficient and infinitely more expensive.

All the government's massive spending is doing is creating a huge renewables bubble and every year, in order to maintain the bubble, they will have to keep putting more and more millions or billions into that bubble to keep it going.

Ordinary people and small businesses everywhere will be paying more for everything, from electricity, food, petrol, manufactured products and so on.

It will become hugely expensive to produce or manufacture anything, making goods more expensive to buy, and inflation will run rampant.

Which is why we urgently need a meaningful public conversation about the practical implications of this attempt to reach Net Zero within 26 years.

We need independent economists, environmental scientists and public policy experts to participate in a serious, open-minded discussion of the engineering, financial and economic realities.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'S. Andrew'.

Stephen Andrew MP
Member for Mirani