




Speech By  
**Sandy Bolton**

**MEMBER FOR NOOSA**

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**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; REVENUE  
AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (7.48 pm): I thank the House for the opportunity to respond to the 2019 Appropriation Bill. I would like to commend the government again on its difficult task—though, as I said last year, regardless of who is in government, fault will be found. This budget appears to seek a balance between coast and country—firstly, by addressing the needs of growth corridors through the provision of essential facilities, including hospitals and schools. These communities are no doubt appreciative they can alleviate the stressors of population growth through new developments.

With the Noosa electorate happily not aspiring to grow in numbers, our search within the budget papers was for increases in the realm of maintaining, sustaining and improving what we already have. It was good to see funding of works for our schools, sports facilities and national parks, a host of programs through organisations such as United Synergies and Pomona Community House, as well as the opportunities offered through increases in grants, including Building the Regions and Back to Work. However, the devil is in the detail and I look forward to unpacking these during estimates.

Our big-ticket items sought last year have seen some progress, and we have been advised that the Beckmans Road upgrade will be staged and funded from the unallocated bucket within TMR. A bid for stage 1, the roundabout at the Cooroy Noosa Road end, will be submitted shortly, hence it was not sought as part of the budget announcements. The upgrade or replacement of the Six Mile bridge No. 7 is our outstanding concern, and we continue our lobbying to get this prioritised and onto QTRIP. In the meantime the focus is on urgently making this dangerous bridge safer, and we are waiting on a response to our recommendations regarding this.

Secondly, there has been a focus on our regional areas with new infrastructure for long-term job creation. I had highlighted in my recent newsletter the importance of providing an alternative to short-term and FIFO positions that are prevalent in these communities and reducing the reliance on controversial projects. It is of concern though that funding does not appear to have been sought for many years by rural regions for water catchment projects such as the Hells Gates Dam, which would assist in growing long-term jobs as well as droughtproofing these regions and cities such as Townsville. Queenslanders would be questioning why we are not getting these projects off the ground given the ongoing traumatic impacts of drought.

Protecting and guiding Queensland's economic growth is essential. However, it is important that it is done in a logical way that looks to the future. There is a question that needs to be answered: is our economic future dependent on a continually increasing population, and what is that target? We cannot sustainably fund new infrastructure if those assets we already have are not being maintained and operated efficiently, unless we have a strategy that is not heavily reliant on population growth. This is demonstrated throughout many electorates where historical issues are still unresolved, including in Noosa where dangerous bridges that were prioritised on QTRIP some 10 years ago are now not even in the running. The daily accidents and near misses involving our families and tourists have become of such concern that questions are raised surrounding our methodology of prioritisation, commitment to

road safety and accident prevention strategies. With over 30 per cent of deaths on our roads not attributed to drink-driving or speed, we must look at our process of prioritisation as I have no doubt that this is contributing to these statistics.

Whilst I commend the government for providing new and expanded hospital services, in turn creating jobs for nurses and doctors, regional communities cannot fill existing positions. In the Noosa hinterland, we have been desperate to fill 10 GP positions as well as attract more home doctor services that are currently absent in servicing these areas. Noosa is not as disadvantaged as rural areas, and I wonder, if we are having these difficulties, what do our country cousins face?

Furthermore, the expansion of facilities does not address issues that cause an overload in demand in the first place. As has been identified, there is often nowhere to go to be seen after hours, such as 24-hour clinics or the home doctor service. Not only does this increase the strain on our emergency departments, it costs the government significantly more. When a patient is seen at a bulk-billing doctor's surgery, it costs the taxpayer \$37. When seen in a casualty or emergency room, it costs \$507. Do the math.

Attending to the symptoms of problems rather than the cause extends into community corrections as well. This budget has funding for an expansion of a corrections precinct due to the overcrowding of prisons, which were operating at 37 per cent over capacity as at September 2018, and led to our youth being held in watch houses. Is this overcrowding contributing to early releases of those violent offenders that should remain incarcerated? Before building more facilities, we need to look at new, sustainable ways to resolve old, unsustainable issues.

Data from the draft report from the Queensland Productivity Commission shows that prisoner internment has done little to decrease reoffending rates, which in Queensland are the highest in Australia and continue to rise. Government should concentrate not only on the symptom but also on how to reduce demand on prisons and the issues causing the increases in prisoner reoffending. As has been done in other countries, we could look at why we utilise incarceration of no-risk, non-violent offenders as a method of punishment. These offenders, who would be much more productive—and at less cost to taxpayers—could be working on essential projects in our communities that continue to go undone, such as in Noosa where there is a need for safe bikeways so that residents can make the modal shift away from cars. Contribution is a key element in building self-esteem, whereas incarceration contributes to the labelling of an offender, making it difficult for them to integrate back into their communities, obtain work and have a better chance of rehabilitation. Every day that we incarcerate a tax evader, drug abuser or thief is costing taxpayers approximately \$180. Yes, that is \$1,260 per week. Could the appropriation of taxpayer funds be better utilised? I think so.

The building of schools and the creation of new teacher positions is essential for our children to obtain a good education. However, this does not address the causes of teacher discontent, with 50 per cent leaving the profession within five years. It is of great concern that the reasons they are leaving are not being addressed, though I do acknowledge that the Education (Queensland College of Teachers) Amendment Bill 2019 offered a small component of relief. I hope that during estimates we find what funds are available to analyse the failings that we are experiencing to ensure that these new schools have teachers available to them.

To continuously build does not make sense in a world where we are seeking to renew, repurpose and recycle. To keep adding to our debt without considering how to better use what we already have, diminish demand through greater education, opportunity, self-responsibility and accountability, and change how we are perceiving the world is a no-win situation, especially when we are unable to adequately maintain our existing infrastructure. This is not sustainable in any language, under any government or ideology.

There are numerous examples for better utilisation of the hard-earned taxpayer dollar. The current replication of sporting facilities, with government needing to fund both school and community sports fields often just down the road from one another, could be improved. Facilities that are shared and that are utilised on multiple days versus only once or twice a week makes both economic and communal sense. This would alleviate the pressure on those organisations that sausage sizzle their way to survival and free up taxpayer dollars to utilise on other priorities.

The Queensland Audit Office have identified flaws in the monitoring and accountability of departments, programs and funding, with entire strategies developed to address an issue but are not then utilised. One example is the biodiversity strategy for Queensland 2011, which cost we do not know what and which was abandoned on completion. This lack of implementation meant that we did not have a framework regarding our endangered species and plant life, and we are now trying to pick up the pieces as a result at greater cost. This is not an isolated example, and it must be extremely frustrating for all involved to see years of hard work left to gather dust on a shelf. We need to be held accountable as MPs for this waste.

Overall, one concern from my electorate is the increasing debt. Understandably, questions being asked include: what is the strategy to reduce that debt, and how are we going to get back a AAA rating in order to access greater discounts on the loan rates? Their fears are not without warrant. Many have lived through depression, recession and the global financial crisis and seek a position of security and sustainability that can only come when we live within our means. There needs to be some assurance around this and how, in the face of another global crisis, Queenslanders will fare.

On a positive front, it has been good to see increases in a number of arenas that we have advocated for including QCAT, QBCC and other resolution agencies that were overloaded, creating delays. However, I have not found extra resources for our community legal services which are desperately being sought by our low-income workers who are confronted with a system that has become increasingly complex. As well, the extra funding for grassroots organisations which are delivering essential frontline services, including to our growing numbers of homeless, and tackling our alarming abuse statistics—physical and otherwise—is appreciated. There is a growing frustration as there is no need for anyone to be homeless. As I have experienced in working through the challenges to develop affordable accommodation including co-housing in my own electorate, it is totally achievable. This can be resolved by all levels of government revising archaic beliefs and regulations and moving to be as innovative as they ask Queenslanders to be.

The frustration of our volunteers and organisations grows. They cannot understand why they lobby for emergency accommodation without success. It is time for us to have a serious parental talk on why we are seeing increasing homelessness, child poverty and financial duress. We need to subscribe to a culture of 'how we can' versus 'why we can't'. I applaud the increased funding for Foodbank that, in conjunction with Waves of Kindness, provide breakfast to around 1,200 children per week in Noosa. However, ultimately what we are doing is bandaiding until a solution is found. This is shame on all of us and does not respect the incredible works of those volunteers, who work so hard in this and many other realms and who are seeking relief in a job they are not paid to do, whereas we are.

Since my first budget, I have seen numerous examples of the frustrations of Queenslanders in dealing with the various levels of government. I give one example as it demonstrates why the taxpayer dollar is not going as far as it should. A constituent's property was impacted by a department doing works next to his fence line. That seems simple enough—it would have taken roughly \$300 to fix the damage—however, it has now taken five years, two MPs, multiple state departments and local government and the matter still is not resolved. The cost in time involved would now amount to thousands. This is shameful and, as an MP, I am highly embarrassed that residents should go through such a process and that there was nowhere for this case, or an MP, to go, demonstrating a severe failing in our accountability and systems.

Having listened to speeches from members on both sides, I can understand why there is little trust in us and our systems. I am often asked, 'Who can be believed?' As an Independent I seek objectively to research and consult all sides respectfully. Credibility is very important to bring forward the thoughts and concerns of our communities and broader Queensland without engaging in the denigration of others or their efforts.

As both sides are aware, crossbenchers are disadvantaged in not having available the parliamentary staff of major parties. In Victoria, crossbenchers receive an extra 1.5 staff, on top of their electorate staff. They utilise these resources to the benefit of their parliament, bringing forward diverse views and options vital to keep the chamber in a healthy state and ensure all are heard equally. I trust that within the next budget equity for crossbenchers and the Queenslanders they represent not only is considered but also is addressed.

In closing, I appreciate the government's efforts in this budget and thank all who worked so hard on this. However, unless we listen more closely to what our regions, communities and constituents seek, unless we allow Queenslanders to accept responsibility for their actions and what they are requesting and unless we are honest and speak plain English on what sustainability really means, we will continue to provide bandaids to fulfil the demands of a growing me-now culture and short political terms. I trust and hope that in the next 12 months we have an open and honest look at what is transpiring and focus not on politicking but instead on what is essential for the wellbeing of Queenslanders and their future.