



Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

Record of Proceedings, 9 September 2020

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (6.52 pm): I rise to speak in this cognate debate on the appropriation bills. Whilst I will not be opposing these bills because we must ensure government functions continue, these bills highlight the incompetence and ignorance of this government and the looming financial crisis which this state will face over the next four years. That crisis is underpinned by a predicted \$102 billion debt—a debt that defies all logic, a debt that will no doubt be worn by generations to come right across Queensland. It would be remiss of us during the course of this debate not to highlight the scale of that debt and what that means for each and every Queenslanders.

When it comes to financial management in this state, the finances were in a perilous state before the pandemic. Whilst this government might like to hang their hat on the pandemic as the reason for bringing these appropriation bills before the parliament, the fact remains that the finances were in disarray, that the finances were a mess and that this state was heading on a perilous journey long before the pandemic actually started.

Just as I did last year when we had a proper budget and a proper estimates process, I will start with the failings of the Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy and the debacle that is mine and quarry safety in Queensland, because things have continued just as they were. Let me remind the House, yet again, of the recommendation of the Coal Workers' Pneumoconiosis Select Committee report that was released over three years ago which states, 'The Mines Inspectorate should increase the proportion of unannounced inspections to a rate of at least 50 per cent of total inspections.'

Despite that, this minister is content with 20 per cent as a goal—20 per cent of inspections that, as we have seen over the term of the Palaszczuk government, has decreased. Between the 2016-17 and 2018-19 financial years, inspections of coalmines were reduced by 11 per cent under this minister's watch. When it comes to audits, the reduction in mineral mines and quarries for the same period was 83 per cent. In that same period eight people have lost their lives in Queensland's mines and quarries. Not only have we failed to meet the recommendations under this minister's watch and not only have the inspections and audits reduced; the unannounced inspections under this minister are actually announced. No wonder there is no need for additional funding: the job that this minister is responsible for is not being done.

What is highlighted by this Appropriation Bill is what is not in there. The fact that this particular portfolio has not required additional funding as part of the bill before the House highlights the importance of the resources sector in this state and the fact that the resources sector has continued unabated throughout the pandemic. In fact, it has been a shining light in Queensland. The royalties—\$5.5 billion in royalties which were predicted to fall into the state government coffers last year; there has been a reduction—are going to get this state out of the trouble that it is in. For that reason, we should be making sure that the resources sector is appropriately supported, is appropriately resourced and, when it comes to infrastructure, that those areas where our mines and quarries are operating are supported—and that

means road infrastructure and it means telecommunications. Only this week we have heard of widescale phone dropouts and problems in Central Queensland. In this day and age that is not good enough because it puts people's lives at risk, not only miners and property owners but also people travelling through those areas. It is a safety risk.

It is only fair that, when it comes to the resources sector and what it contributes to Queensland's economy, we get our fair share of the pie flowing back into those mining areas such as the electorate of my colleague the member for Gregory. There are a number of mines in his area as well. Not only have we failed to meet that criteria, but now we have a scaled back quasi-budget. After all, it was during last year's estimates that we saw, in writing, the failings of the department. The bad news for Queensland's mine and quarry workers is that those failings have not been addressed. Like the former member for Bundamba said, the Palaszczuk government pokes coalminers in the eye and uses them as pawns—pawns who are failed time and time again when it comes to mine safety.

Let me be very clear: if Minister Lynham or the Treasurer stood up in this House and said they needed more money to increase inspections to fulfil the recommendations of a bipartisan committee with expert advice, I, for one, would support them. Every mineworker in Queensland needs to know that it was this minister and the Palaszczuk government that cut 25 per cent from the natural resources management services in the last budget, despite the actual spend being 30 per cent above the budget. I asked last year what was being cut, and I repeat that question now: Minister, what is being cut?

One thing that definitely is not being cut is the charges being forced upon our primary producers. They will recall that it was this minister and this government that, until the COVID-19 pandemic, planned to smack them with increased charges and, when the pandemic hit, they put those increases on hold. They are not gone; they are just hidden away for this minister to reveal after the election. This government would have Queenslanders believe that they have their best interests at heart and that they can go to the election and some time after the election they will bring down a proper budget. Queenslanders are supposed to believe them and trust them. On their track record, we know that that is far from the case.

The only party with a plan to help primary production grow is the LNP. The Palaszczuk government does not have any plan when it comes to agriculture in this state. After all, primary producers have been demonised by this government to the same extent as our coalminers. If the minister does not need any more funding because he has failed to do the job that Queenslanders need, then one has to question why that is the case when we still have safety issues in our mines and our quarries.

It is a dark day for Queensland when two of our key industries have been failed by one minister and failed by a government. I will not be voting against these bills because our teachers, our Corrective Services officers, our police and our fireys deserve to be paid for what they do for this state.