



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



## **HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

### **Federation Chamber**

### **BILLS**

**Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2012-2013,  
Appropriation Bill (No. 2) 2012-2013,  
Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments)  
Bill (No. 1) 2012-2013, Appropriation Bill (No. 5)  
2011-2012, Appropriation Bill (No. 6) 2011-2012**

### **Second Reading**

### **SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 29 May 2012**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Tuesday, 29 May 2012  
**Page** 6181  
**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Cobb, John, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr JOHN COBB** (Calare) (19:36): I rise to speak on the Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2012-2013 and in reply to the federal budget, which was handed down earlier this month. I will speak on its impact on households and businesses in Calare and on agriculture and industry in Australia, but particularly on its impact in central-western New South Wales. It will come as no surprise that I think the budget is a disaster, not because I am in opposition but because this Labor government has failed to implement any measures to improve the economy in its time in power. All it has done is introduce tax after tax and, at the same time, put us in record levels of debt in a record short amount of time. Regional Australia has been completely neglected in this budget. From any regional perspective—whether it is on the edge of Melbourne, in western New South Wales or anywhere else—it is a disgrace.

Ten days after the last election, nearly two years ago, the Prime Minister told the National Press Club:

... the new Parliament will also have a focus on the needs of regional Australia.

... ..

We don't have to re-discover regional Australia - because we never lost it.

From well before our election in 2007 we have taken the needs and interests of regional Australia as one of our priorities and this is reflected in our record in government.

Let us have a good look at the record. This government has allocated almost 80 per cent, or \$16 million, of \$20 million of funding that was meant for regional Australia in last week's budget to projects in Melbourne, Adelaide and Hobart. Only \$4 million went to projects outside capital cities, and that \$4 million was used just to keep the votes of two independents in conservative electorates, who are traitors to those electorates.

Further, the largest allocation from the government's Regional Infrastructure Fund, \$480 million, went to fund road upgrades around Perth airport. While I am happy for Perth, I am not aware that it counts as a regional spend. Another \$54 million will be spent on upgrades to the Blacksoil Interchange around Brisbane. That is nice for Brisbane, but it is still not much good for regional Australia. As with the carbon tax, this government has done the exact opposite of what it promised regional Australia. This Labor Prime Minister promised that there would be no carbon tax under the government she led. We have all heard it a lot, but it is still true. After all that, she introduced the carbon tax. She promised that regional Australia would be a priority under her government then she took the money for regional Australia and gave it to major cities. It is an absolute disgrace. I know that people in the bush will not forget this easily.

We in Calare did not get a great deal. I will acknowledge the things that Calare got in the budget: a Peak Hill multipurpose centre that we had attempting to get for some time; \$1½ million for a hydrotherapy pool at Dudley Private Hospital, that works in closely with public health; almost \$4 million for the Orange Aboriginal Medical Centre redevelopment; \$6 million to construct a family medical practice at CSU Bathurst; and, over four years and the whole of regional Australia money will be spent on encouraging dentists to relocate to regional and remote areas.

Unlike those opposite, I will give credit for things that are good and these funding announcements are very welcome. But before this government should pat itself on the back, let us look at the bad news. Unfortunately for those opposite, the bad news far outweighs the good. On a local level, there are very disappointing omissions. No money was allocated to the ongoing project for a medical school at Charles Sturt University in Orange and as every man and his dog that has ever looked at the issue knows, unless you train regional people in regional situations you do not retain them where they are most needed, which is in regional Australia. There was nothing in the budget for Bathurst, nothing for Oberon, nothing for Lithgow, nothing for Forbes.

For the people of Calare as a whole, an incredibly important part of any budget—federal, state or otherwise—is funding for roads. That is why it is unacceptable that road funding has fallen to the lowest point in over a decade. Overall expenditure on roads plummeted from \$6.2 billion in 2011-12 to \$2.6 billion in 2012-13. Even that figure of \$2.6 billion is the result of fudging the figures, something that appears to be one of the few talents possessed by the government.

Perhaps most disappointing of all is the complete omission of funding for the much-needed Bells Line expressway project, namely funding for an engineering study or funding to secure the corridor. This is a project that successive Labor government's have refused to support. In 2007 the then Prime Minister John Howard announced funding to do the engineering on the Bells Line of Road, to be matched by the state government. Fast forward five years and the project is still on the shelf. It goes to the heart of one of the many downfalls of this government and that is its neglect of rural, regional and remote areas.

Almost 80 per cent of funding meant for regional Australia in last week's budget went to Melbourne, Adelaide and Hobart—and I have nothing against those three places, but they are not regional Australia. A detailed analysis of regional development issues in the budget shows that almost \$16 million of \$20 million in new regional development funding went to projects in capital cities. Those projects funded by the Gillard government include \$8.7 million for a sports and community precinct in Hobart. I suppose regional people go to Hobart but it is certainly not in regional Tasmania. There was \$3.4 million for an enterprise in Adelaide, and I am sure South Australians go to Adelaide but I do not really think that is catering for their direct needs. There was \$2 million for a Greek culture centre in Melbourne and \$1.5 million for an Islamic Muslim centre in Melbourne. I am very happy for those places but this was regional money being spent in areas of population, not in regional locations.

Only \$4 million went to projects outside capital cities. As I said earlier, all these funds were spent to secure the vote of two Independents in conservative electorates who had, from memory, Labor votes of around eight to 15 per cent respectively in the last election. This government does not understand the bush. It does not acknowledge the bush and it does not care about it. As my colleague and the leader of the National Party said, this budget fails to inspire or encourage struggling communities and families in regional Australia. That will be to this Labor government's eternal detriment and eternal shame.

The carbon tax will also be to the detriment of this government. It is the world's biggest carbon tax, the toxic tax that will hit businesses, hurt our families and do nothing that it supposedly aims to do—that is, help the environment. That is the biggest puzzle about all this. The environmental improvement is virtually nonexistent. At a time when business confidence is at such a low, when the government has a record net debt of \$145 billion, when the cost of living is one of the greatest concerns facing Australians today, this government thinks it is a good time and a good idea to introduce the world's biggest carbon tax. The carbon tax will act as a wrecking ball across the local economy, particularly regional ones and particularly Calare. We will all be paying for it through increased prices, higher energy bills and pressures on local businesses.

Never mind the government's claim of returning the budget to surplus. That is simply a fabrication, a cooking of the books, and everybody, particularly the Treasurer, knows it. But it is more than that: it is all spin and no substance. Take the National Disability Insurance Scheme. This is a very significant policy and one that the coalition supports. The government has announced \$1 billion for the scheme—never mind that it is \$2 billion short on what the Productivity Commission recommended. We understand, and there are serious reports, that there is in fact no funding stream out of the budget for it. The finance minister would not rule out further taxes to fund the scheme. Then the Treasurer told the media that he was not entirely sure how much revenue would be raised from the dreaded mining tax—the very tax which was needed to fund these additional income support payments.

This budget is more about buying votes than it is about restoring the economy that it has sought to destroy. This budget is about cash handouts rather than investing money. This is not a budget about the future. This budget is about the government making a last ditch effort to win back voters who abandoned it when it broke many promises but particularly the one on a carbon tax.

I want to take some time now to talk about agriculture. My counterpart, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Senator Ludwig, has decided to defend himself in the media lately. It is good to see that Senator Ludwig has some fight in him, and I hope that he can use some of that same resolve to finally stand up for agriculture. But I am a little amused that the agriculture minister put out a press release last week saying that the

opposition had no vision for agriculture. This is a minister in a government that had no agriculture policy at all at the last election. It did not announce one; it did not even go there; it did not mention it. This is from a minister whose department has taken the word 'agriculture' out of its primary vision, out of its mojo.

Since Labor came to power the agriculture sector has been under constant threat and attack. After cutting Land and Water Australia and after cutting funding from CSIRO and funding to the CRCs—\$60 million—the government conspired with the Productivity Commission to cut research and development funding to RDCs. The coalition had to join with everybody, whether it was MLA, whether it was GRDC or whether it was a state organisation, to defend the government funding vigorously until, finally, Labor did back down. But they actually intended to pull 50 per cent of their funding from R&D.

In this budget the government cut FarmReady and the National Weeds and Productivity Research Program. Also, all the signs were there that they were going to cut Caring for our Country in the budget, with many stakeholders raising concerns. The government did not, and that is great, but it is a bit sick or a bit sad when a government has to claim that simply continuing funding for a program is a win for agriculture. It was a win that they did not cut it—because they obviously wanted to—but, to claim it as a win that they have not is a little different.

At the same time, this government has put our industry's viability under threat from a massive increase in red tape and business costs. We have a sector that has to absorb the world's largest carbon tax and compete internationally with businesses that do not face this cost. The minister has tried to remind us that agriculture was not actually suffering the tax. That kind of ignorance is what makes us all despair—because no sector is more affected by this tax than agriculture. The government has removed the 40 per cent rebate on AQIS inspections, which has led to an across-the-board registration fee increase in the order of 1,000 per cent to small export operators such as cold stores, specialist meat processors and private grain stores and which makes it much more difficult for new businesses to enter the market. We have seen the new draft legislation for the chemical regulator, the APVMA, being considered by the government that will increase the cost of chemical registration to the sector by one-third, about \$9 million. It will impose another layer of regulation, with automatic five-year reviews, adding to the inefficiency while not addressing the slow, cumbersome and costly chemical review process that sees products being used and registered by our competitor countries 18 months and two years before us.

We have a government that unilaterally shut down live exports without considering the impact on a \$1 billion industry and without consulting the major trader and our closest and vital trading partner, Indonesia. This has further reduced our competitiveness internationally by forcing overseas markets to factor in sovereign risk when doing business with Australia. This is a government whose idea of Murray-Darling Basin reform is to keep basin communities in a state of permanent drought through buybacks instead of investing in infrastructure and water use efficiency to deliver triple bottom line reform.

The government did give some much needed funding to biosecurity for a new quarantine station, but it is over seven years. *(Time expired)*