




Speech By
Jeff Seeney

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

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PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT

Royalties for the Regions

 **Mr SEENEY** (Callide—LNP) (2.46 pm): It should come as no surprise that a Labor government that has ignored regional Queensland for so long would seek to discredit the success of the Royalties for the Regions program. I welcome this opportunity to completely reject Labor's absurd accusations about the R4R program and also to reject many of the conclusions of the Auditor-General's report upon which those ridiculous claims have been based. The Auditor-General's report was compiled, of course, on the advice of the Labor administration. Following a briefing that we have just had with the Auditor-General, it was compiled on incomplete information—very much incomplete information—as one would expect with a change of government, I suppose, given what we know of the Australian Labor Party. Because the Auditor-General's report was compiled using incomplete information, the report has reached some factually and fundamentally wrong conclusions that are grossly misleading and fundamentally flawed.

The R4R program provided a multi-channel conduit to invest in infrastructure in regional Queensland using a number of funding pathways, of which local government identified projects was but one. Local government submitted projects were the only projects that were required to be assessed by my department. The government took decisions to proceed with R4R projects both at cabinet and through the Cabinet Budget Review Committee process. Those projects were never subject to DSDIP assessment or any reference to the guidelines prepared for councils. Cabinet made the decision, as cabinet is entitled to do. That is the critical error in the Auditor-General's report. It is the critical information that is missing and, of course, it will produce an absurd outcome.

To achieve its objectives, R4R funding decisions for council initiated projects had to be based on more than a competitive cost-benefit analysis, especially in the comparison of projects in large regional centres, such as Rockhampton and Gladstone, and projects in small communities, such as Miles and Karumba. Adopting a competitive cost-benefit analysis assessment approach would have defeated the purpose of the R4R program and smaller communities would have continued to receive no infrastructure funding, just as they have done for generations under the Labor Party.

I disagree completely with the Auditor-General's proposal that distribution of funding across party electorates is a test of the equity and impartiality of the decision-making process. Not only did the LNP hold the majority of eligible electorates at the time, those held by non-LNP members included the large urban centres of Rockhampton, Gladstone and Mackay, all of which flooded the process with applications but had plenty of resources of their own to fund their infrastructure.

Royalties for the Regions was a long overdue investment in the future of country towns and country people that had been ignored for many generations. R4R provided water supplies, sewerage systems, road upgrades, airport improvements, childcare centres, medical centres, swimming pools and a better future for country people.