



Speech by

JEFF SEENEY

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

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**APPROPRIATION BILL
Estimates Committee D
Report**

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (5.20 p.m.): I appreciate the opportunity to make some brief comments on the Estimates committee hearing relating to the Department of Natural Resources. On reading the transcript of this committee hearing I was initially struck by the opening statement of the Minister, who said—

"The past 15 months have seen significant progress to a more confident and certain future for Queensland ..."

Nothing could be further from the truth. I was amazed at that comment. Nothing constitutes a better illustration of the degree to which this Minister is out of touch with his departmental responsibilities than that statement.

Minister Welford must surely be living with the fairies. Certainly he is totally blind to the realities of the issues in his portfolio area. In the past 15 months, rural and regional Queensland have in fact almost totally lost confidence and certainty following a series of resource management issues that initially have caused concern, then alarm and, in some cases, almost panic as Minister Welford's agenda has become clear to rural land-holders.

The Minister's handling of the critically important water resource issues has been abysmal and has thrown the developing irrigation industry into disarray. The uncertainty that he has generated in relation to water allocations and entitlements strikes at the heart of the irrigation industry. The complete freeze on capital works that is reflected in this Budget has destroyed any hope that irrigators have had for the future. The Minister's handling of vegetation management issues has been worse than abysmal. He has attacked the worth of freehold title, he has threatened land values across the State and he has thrown the land development programs of almost every land-holder into disarray and, in some cases, unfortunately, into panic mode.

In his opening statement to the Estimates committee, Minister Welford almost unbelievably went on to say—

"I am pleased to say that I have a very good working relationship with rural industry, which is vitally important ..."

He is right about one thing: it is important for the Minister for Natural Resources to have a good working relationship with rural industry, but how breathtakingly untrue is the rest of that statement! There has never been a Minister from any Queensland Government of any political persuasion that is so hated and despised in rural and regional Queensland than the current Minister for Natural Resources. Is it any wonder?

Not only has Minister Welford, in his blind pursuit of an ideological agenda, taken away any certainty or hope for the future of so many rural communities, he has also attacked the people of rural Queensland themselves. Firstly, he set out to ridicule them, claiming that they were breeding dingos to falsely claim a \$10 bounty. Then, in what was one of the most cynical propaganda campaigns ever seen in Queensland politics, he set out to demonise the people of rural Queensland as environmental vandals who, in his blinkered and twisted mind, were working 24 hours a day destroying trees for the sadistic fun of it.

The Minister has blatantly ignored any attempt at objectivity in every issue he has dealt with in the past 15 months. Instead, he has driven a propaganda campaign against farmers to try to justify his own preconceived ideological positions on a range of resource management issues. He obviously has no concept of the economics of land development and has totally refused to acknowledge or consider the huge advances in recognising and achieving sustainability that have been made by the very people whom he has set out to demonise.

Tragically, the Minister also refuses to acknowledge the depth of the practical land management experience both within the general rural community and within the Department of Natural Resources. He refuses to give due recognition to the incredible effort that has gone into organisations such as Landcare and Integrated Catchment Management and has ignored their emerging success stories over recent years. There are many success stories that have been achieved by both of those organisations, both of which are, in the main, made up of people who give their time voluntarily and have a huge commitment to the task.

Instead, rural land-holders have been subject to a continual flow of ideological rubbish from the Minister, which has no practical focus and serves only to cause alarm in rural Queensland. Tragically, in so many cases, it brings about the opposite result to what all responsible stakeholders are trying to achieve and what responsible rural leaders have been successfully working towards for many years. That is the tragedy of the incompetence of the Minister for Natural Resources—an incompetence that was reinforced by his responses to the Estimates committee.

The Minister has caused more harm than he can realise and he is not even aware that he has done so. If this Government wants to re-establish a sensible dialogue with rural Queensland and achieve a sensible resolution to these important resource management issues, then Welford should be sacked forthwith. He should be sacked and replaced with a new Minister who can take a balanced view of the issues that are so important to all Queenslanders.

Rural Queensland can never hope for a fair deal from a Minister who is clearly an ideologist, pursuing his own agenda to the exclusion of all other interests and completely oblivious to the reality of the situation. That was no better illustrated than by the Minister's responses to the Estimates committee.
