



Speech by

**JEFF SEENEY**

**MEMBER FOR CALLIDE**

---

Hansard 7 December 1999

### **RURAL QUEENSLAND**

**Mr SEENEY** (Callide—NPA) (12.10 p.m.): I rise today to participate in this Matters of Public Interest debate, to stand up for the people of rural Queensland and the primary producers across the State, and to say simply on their behalf that enough is enough. On behalf of those people, I want to say that we are proud of the contribution we make to this State's economy; we are proud of the contribution we make to the unique Queensland culture; we are proud of the professionalism and the ingenuity of the operators who constitute our primary industries and it is about time they were given the recognition and the credit they deserve.

It is high time that the know-it-all urban media and the know-it-all ideologists in the Labor Government cast aside the old stereotypes and took a fresh look at primary industries and the people who are involved in them and took a fresh look at the way the urban media seek to portray farmers generally. It is about time that the whole business of farming and the professionals who are engaged in it as a career were awarded a much higher level of esteem in the general community and a much higher priority in the business of this State Parliament.

Of late it seems that everyone is an expert on the core issues that affect our primary industries; everyone is an expert on resource management; everyone is an expert on industry deregulation; and everyone is an expert on industry development. This week everyone is an expert on resource management—everyone, that is, except the people who have invested their futures in primary industry and everyone except the people who have been managing those resources for generations.

It seems that everyone is claiming expertise from a safe distance. Everyone is claiming expertise from the safety of a comfortable urban existence. And to top it all off, yesterday the Premier claimed expertise from 40,000 feet in the air in the comfort of the Government jet. It is easy to be an expert and to develop fine sounding ideologies from the comfort of urban isolation and the comfort of the Government jet. The Government's cute ideologies and oversimplistic solutions will not and do not last long in the harsh economic and climatic reality of the real world of rural Queensland—that is, if Government members ever leave the bitumen road and the airconditioned office and put their feet on the ground.

Many members of this Beattie Labor Government display their arrogance and their ignorance every time there is a debate in this House about primary industries or resource management issues. From the Premier through to the backbench, no member of the current Government has demonstrated even a basic understanding of the complexities of primary industries or the very real issues that we, who engage in primary industries, face. In the two portfolios most important to rural Queensland, the Minister for Natural Resources and the Minister for Primary Industries have demonstrated a woeful lack of capacity to even understand the issues that are involved, let alone respond in ways to produce positive outcomes for the industries that rely on them or for the State as a whole.

No member of the Labor Government has taken the time or the trouble to genuinely try to understand the real issues that confront primary industries and rural Queenslanders generally. Instead, the Beattie Labor Government has adopted a systematic approach of demonising and vilifying farmers and land-holders generally in relation to a range of issues which a succession of Labor Ministers clearly know nothing about. Indeed, the Government's whole approach to rural Queensland has been to try to justify its ideologically driven approach by demonising and vilifying Queensland's rural land-holders in a

totally unforgivable manner. It is difficult and, I would suggest, dangerous for any Government to underestimate the growing level of frustration and anger at the continuation of this preposterous approach. Rural Queensland has had enough of the political doublespeak and the cynical manipulation of a compliant urban media by this Labor Government.

This Government's handling of its responsibilities with respect to the management of Queensland water resources has been terrible. Its handling of the vegetation management issues has been worse than abysmal. Minister Welford has attacked the worth of freehold title; he has attacked the worth of irrigation entitlements; he has threatened land values across the State; and he has thrown the land development programs of almost every land-holder in Queensland into disarray. Unfortunately, in some cases, he has thrown those land development programs into panic mode. Now Premier Beattie, in an attempt to deflect pressure from the extreme greens, has joined the attack. From 40,000 feet and at 400 miles per hour he is suddenly an expert on resource management. How breathtakingly untrue it is to claim that this Government has any sort of a working relationship with rural industry or understands even remotely the issues in rural Queensland.

There has never ever been a Queensland Government of any political persuasion that has been more out of touch than this Labor Government is with the issues of rural Queensland in general and resource management in particular. That was clearly illustrated by the response of key Ministers in question time this morning, notably the Minister for Primary Industries, who did not have a clue about the issues posed to him in the question he was asked. In this Government's blind pursuit of an ideological agenda, it has taken away any certainty or hope for the future of so many rural communities.

Not only has it destroyed the hope that the irrigation industry had for a major infrastructure development program, not only has it attacked the worth and basis of traditional land titles but it has also attacked the people of rural Queensland themselves. Nothing illustrates that better than the claim by the Minister for Natural Resources that we were breeding dingoes to falsely claim a \$10 bounty. Nothing illustrates that better than the claim by the Treasurer that our wives would suddenly take to driving the cattle truck to town to rot the diesel fuel rebate. Nothing illustrates better the extent to which this Government completely fails to understand rural Queensland and the people who live and work there and who generate the State's wealth than the recent tree clearing debacle.

In recent months we have seen one of the most cynical propaganda campaigns ever mounted in Queensland politics—a propaganda campaign that obviously has set out to demonise the people of rural Queensland as environmental vandals—as irresponsible resource managers. I believe that that propaganda campaign that attempts to demonise the people of rural Queensland has been driven directly from the office of the Minister for Natural Resources and has been ably assisted by his ideologically like-minded cohorts in the Queensland Conservation Council and, of course, yesterday the high-flying Premier in the Government jet. That propaganda campaign has been the forerunner of the introduction of a series of pieces of legislation which will change forever the resource use and the traditional primary production resource base of rural Queensland.

This Government has blatantly ignored any attempt at objectivity in every issue it has dealt with in the past 15 months. The Minister for Natural Resources has blatantly ignored any attempt at objectivity on any issue within his department. Instead, he and the Government generally have driven this propaganda campaign. They have encouraged a media blitz against farmers to try to justify their own preconceived ideological positions on a range of resource management issues. It has been difficult to find any evidence at all of any understanding of the economics of land development or the economics of primary production in any of the contributions to this House from the Minister or from any member on the Government side of the House. There has been no evidence of any understanding by the Minister of the economics of resource management—

**Mr Palaszczuk:** You are so out of touch.

**Mr SEENEY:**—particularly the Minister for Primary Industries, who likes to interject. This morning he demonstrated that he has absolutely no understanding of the issues that are involved in his portfolio. He likes to act the clown around rural Queensland, but in the end he knows nothing about the job that he has been given; he knows nothing about the issues that he is involved in; and he knows nothing about the effect that his incompetence is having on rural Queensland.

Huge advances have been made in recent years towards recognising and achieving the goals of sustainability in rural Queensland. Huge advances have been made by the very people whom this Government set out to demonise. Tragically, it seems that this Government cannot or will not acknowledge the depth of practical land management experience both within the general Queensland rural community and within the Department of Natural Resources. It refuses to recognise the skills and the experience of Queensland farmers generally. It refuses to recognise the skills and experience that have been built up over generations. It refuses to recognise those skills and experience because it does not understand even what skills are involved.

They have consistently refused and still refuse to give recognition for the incredible effort that has gone into organisations such as Landcare and Integrated Catchment Management and for their emerging success stories. How many times have we heard about those success stories in this Parliament? How many times have we heard those people praised by the Minister for Primary Industries or the Minister for Natural Resources? Those opposite should show us the record. How many times do we hear a positive contribution? Instead, we hear negative contributions all the time. We hear attacks on those people all the time in an attempt to justify a preconceived agenda.

Rural land-holders have been subject to this continual flow of ideological rubbish that has no practical focus, serves only to cause alarm in rural Queensland and, tragically, in many cases brings about a result opposite to what all responsible stakeholders have been trying to achieve. Too often we end up with a result opposite to what responsible rural leaders have been working successfully towards for many years. We end up with the opposite result because of the ham-fisted, bull in a china shop approach of people who do not have a clue what they are talking about.

Time expired.

---