



Speech by

Mr M. VEIVERS

MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT

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**APPROPRIATION BILL
Estimates Committee G
Report**

Mr VEIVERS (Southport—NPA) (3.53 p.m.): The recent Victorian election has highlighted the fact that Australia is becoming two societies. The divide between rich and poor has expanded considerably, and it is widely recognised that the rural and regional sectors of this nation are missing out. More than ever before, our primary industries need the support and commitment of the Government; they need policies which provide vision and hope for the future; and they need practical and straightforward assistance which gives them some chance of reducing the rapid spiral of decline that they are now experiencing. They need to know that their State Government cares about them enough to give them a fair go.

And what have they got from the Beattie Labor Government? They have a Minister for Primary Industries who has, for the past 18 months, simply and systematically removed almost every chance our rural sector has for a fair go. They have received a DPI budget which has been slashed by \$27m. They have received a DPI capital works program which has been cut back by 20%. They have received a new tax on capital works—that Beattie stealth tax—which will cost the DPI \$11.3m this financial year. Our primary producers know that this arrangement will force the DPI to extract higher returns from its existing assets, and they are fully expecting to be hit with new fee-for-service charges or to see a DPI sell-off of infrastructure and assets which do not return the required 6% dividend—a sell-off which will only add to the damage being done by the Beattie Labor Government.

They have seen much-needed water development programs cancelled, stalled or completely lost in the Palaszczuk paper shuffle. They have seen their timber industry all but disappear. They have had George Street bureaucrats determine that Queensland property owners are incapable of deciding how to administer their own properties and that they should be told how to manage their vegetation processes.

Our primary producers have suffered a \$9m purge of the DPI animal and health budget, when animal and plant health is one of the most important trade issues of all. We heard words from Mr Beattie, the Premier, yesterday. We have heard words from the Primary Industries Minister this morning. As a net exporter, and a State so dependent on our clean and green market reputation, pest and disease surveillance is just too important to compromise.

Queensland's major beef-producing areas have suffered a reduction of 11 research and extension jobs from the DPI Beef Industry Services Division. The fact is that our producers struggle in a market which has seen prices slide. Even though they contribute \$1.7 billion to this State's export earnings and regional employment, that does not seem to generate any pride or support from Queensland's Minister for Primary Industries.

The hope provided by the coalition Government's budget commitment to scrap stamp duty on crop insurance and loan refinancing has been diminished by the Beattie Government's refusal to uphold these initiatives. In fact, what our primary producers have seen is a return to the bad old days of the Goss Labor Government, when millions of dollars were plundered and hundreds of jobs were lost to sackings, redundancies and retrenchments. Now, our dairy industry has been told to wait and see. The

Primary Industries Minister, Henry Palaszczuk, does not have the knowledge, expertise or strength to make a decision for himself or for Queensland's dairy industry. He has asked our dairy farmers to hang on and see what Victoria does. He does not have the courage to state that dairy deregulation will only benefit the big processors and the big retailers; that there is nothing in it for Queensland dairy farmers.

It has not even been 12 months since post farm gate deregulation, and the public have been hit with two price increases totalling 12c per litre. Deregulation was supposed to deliver more choices and lower prices, but obviously it is proving to be the opposite. Total deregulation of the dairy industry, including removal of the regulated farm gate price, would push farm gate prices down and force hundreds of dairy farmers out of the industry. The sheer size of the industry and the aggressive nature of the major processors and retailers will make sure of that.

And if Mr Palaszczuk does not have the courage to take a stand on deregulation on behalf of Queensland dairy farmers, then he should at least have the courage to show bipartisan support for the billion-dollar, five-year restructuring package proposed by the Australian Dairy Farmers Federation. The Queensland coalition certainly does not support dairy deregulation, but at least we recognise that our dairy farmers will need support should it go ahead. At least we understand that a contingency plan needs to be put in place and our dairy farmers given every opportunity to restructure their businesses to survive.

I have only touched on a few of the damaging effects of this Beattie Labor Government.

Time expired.
