



Speech by

Hon. RUSSELL COOPER

MEMBER FOR CROWS NEST

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PERFORMANCE OF MINISTERS

Hon. T. R. COOPER (Crows Nest—NPA) (6.40 p.m.): I support the motion, although it is with some regret because most people seem to think that Henry is a good bloke. It is the advice that he gets that I have a problem with. He has a major problem with some of his advisers, be they political advisers or whatever. That is a tragedy, because the Minister for Primary Industries has been sold a pup on many occasions. I do not think he deserves that; he deserves better.

I have always thought that the current Minister for Primary Industries is a cut above previous Ministers, namely Mr Gibbs—can members believe it—and Ed Casey. During the six years of its administration, the Goss Government tore the heart out of rural and regional Queensland and it tore the heart out of the Department of Primary Industries. The people of the bush will never forget the treatment afforded to them by the Goss Government: the railway closures; the courthouse closures; the sacking of 700 hardworking DPI officers and the borrowing of \$7.5m to pay them out—a debt that the Borbidge Government was left to pay off; the theft of the State Government's annual \$500,000 contribution to maintaining meat safety and hygiene standards through the QLMA; and the service cutbacks. The list is endless. The people of the bush will never forget that and nor should they forget it, because the Labor leopard never changes its spots.

When the Borbidge Government took office in 1996, the Department of Primary Industries was in an emaciated and wretched state. It was punch-drunk from the ongoing assaults on its annual budget as Labor frantically tried to prop up its support base in Brisbane and the major provincial cities. We set about returning the DPI to what it should be. Former Ministers Perrett and Rowell replaced 700 sacked staff, not in the Brisbane office but in the field where they were needed. We set about restoring the budget to levels that better reflect the contribution of primary industries to this State, providing a \$30m boost in two and a half years.

When the coalition left office in mid 1998, the Department of Primary Industries was back on track. The people of the bush recognised our achievements and they remember them. They have watched the Beattie Government carefully, and so they should. Unfortunately for the bush, the honeymoon period has come to an end. We are already witnessing this Government's return to the failed policies and the ministerial incompetence that is so reminiscent of the Goss administration.

The promise to the member for Nicklin not to increase taxes and charges above the CPI has been broken. Under the Beattie Government's new QLMA fee schedule, the fees paid by butchers and meat processors have jumped by up to 300% in less than 12 months. Those new fees will see jobs lost and businesses close their doors. Despite the widespread concern, the Premier and Primary Industries Minister are apparently too busy to meet with the meat industry representatives. What has happened to the supposed open and inclusive government?

We have seen industry institutes start to falter as the Minister succumbs to the resistance of the bureaucracy and Labor's closed shop policy. Those institutes were one of the most exciting concepts in the modern delivery of research, development and extension services to primary industries. Chaired by respected and accomplished industry representatives and administered by a board of industry and Government expertise, they epitomised open government. They were to give primary industries a say in where the research dollars should be directed to get more bang for the taxpayer's buck. It has been only 10 months since the Beattie Government took office and those institutes have been run off the rails. So far, the chairman of the Farming Systems Institute and another board member have resigned

in frustration. The Queensland Grain Growers Association is calling for an external review. Queensland farm organisations are fast losing confidence in the Beattie Government.

Instead of directing his energies towards fixing the very serious problems within the Department of Primary Industries, which affect the department's ability to meet farmers' needs, too often the Minister chooses to play cheap politics. I must clarify that: it is not necessarily the Minister but some of his minders who are doing that. Some of his boofheaded minders have no idea whatsoever about respect for constituents or anyone else. Those sorts of people are giving the Minister a very bad reputation, and that is a tragedy.

Every Minister in the Beattie Government, including the Deputy Premier, blames somebody else. They blame someone on this side, they blame the Feds, they blame anyone but never themselves. One of the problems that Government members have is that they cannot recognise when they are making mistakes and causing problems. They listen to stupid advice from boofheaded advisers.

Time expired.
