



Speech by

**ROSA LEE LONG**

**MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS**

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Hansard 2 August 2001

**APPROPRIATION BILLS [ESTIMATES COMMITTEE G]**

**Ms LEE LONG** (Tablelands—ONP) (4.58 p.m.): I rise to speak in this debate on the report of Estimates Committee G. With reference to the Primary Industries budget, the thing that surprised me was how small the budget was at \$299.6 million. Compared to the Education budget of \$4.3 billion, this is chickenfeed. It clearly shows how little this government really cares for the needs of country people when it can direct so little of its resources to primary industries.

However, I was pleased to note the projected increase of 66 per cent in the gross value of sugar cane in this financial year. I am also encouraged to hear the minister's report for a major state government project to develop a new fuel ethanol industry from cane. I understand that ethanol-blended fuel will be used in Q-Fleet vehicles from this year and will also be available to other motorists.

The minister also stated that there were expected increases in the value of production of fruit and vegetables, such as mandarins, mangoes, pineapples, avocados and tomatoes. This is welcome news as tobacco production in my electorate winds down and farmers turn to alternative crops such as those that I have just mentioned, at the risk of flooding the market.

It is interesting to note that the pork and poultry industries are also forecast to grow after having been almost decimated some years ago as a result of foreign imports and deregulation. With reference to the pork industry, the minister stated—

Our big problem is that we have limited production capability to develop our exports.

Our farmers, being smart farmers, would need only some encouragement from the government to rise to the task and overcome this problem. Some years ago one pork producer in my electorate found his own export market in Asia, but because many other local producers had been forced from the industry through government intervention, he had to source pigs from southern farmers to meet the demand. That worked well until this Labor government put obstacles in his way which prevented him from using the only viable means of transport available to him, Q-Rail. This has effectively clipped his wings.

The increase in pork exports is largely due to the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in Asia—a virus that wiped out Malaysia's pig herds and created food safety problems in Europe. Nevertheless, even though at present our pork exports are small, the minister has stated that they should increase by 300 per cent over three years. This is good news and has come at a time when much of Queensland's industry is in a depressed state. Whilst we would not wish to find export markets because of the tragedy that others are suffering, these export markets are most timely.

The increase in beef and live cattle exports has also been a real shot in the arm for producers after decades of poor prices. Again, the only downside is that it has come about largely due to the unfortunate spread of foot-and-mouth disease in Europe and Asia. The minister stated that beef exports increased from \$1.5 billion in 1998 to more than \$2.2 billion in 2000. That has put the industry in a healthy position and is assisting the economy of Queensland as a whole.

The minister made mention of a group of producers who formed an alliance with people in the transport, processing, food services and retail sectors to deliver a bulk product and thereby provide more profitability to the participants. This must have presented a huge challenge, which they faced and surmounted. This group is to be commended.

In conclusion, most primary producers in my electorate are doing it tough and any assistance from the minister's department would be gratefully received.