



Speech by

**Hon. HENRY PALASZCZUK**

**MEMBER FOR INALA**

Hansard 27 November 2003

### MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

#### Fire Ants; Primary Industries and Rural Communities Portfolio

**Hon. H. PALASZCZUK** (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Rural Communities) (9.56 a.m.): Today's *Courier-Mail* carries an article about the chemical baits used to eradicate red imported fire ants in the greater Brisbane region. Each of these baits has been permitted for use by Australia's National Registration Authority for Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals, which is now known as the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority. The authority's approval for the use of these baits and its determination that they were safe and effective was announced in September 2001.

The baits have to be of extremely low toxicity to work. The worker ant needs to retrieve the bait as food and deliver it back to the nest. Indeed, the active ingredients in these baits are used elsewhere in the community, such as in flea control for dogs and mosquito spraying in and around our waterways. With the support of all Australian governments, we believe the current campaign is the safest and most effective way to deal with one of the world's most invasive pests. I would like to remind all honourable members of the enormous threat that the fire ant poses to our animal and plant life.

Primary industries are important to Queensland. Our ability to produce enough food for a population 10 or 11 times the size of our own underpins our economy and our way of life. In the last five and a half years we have strived to ensure our industries are quality, safe and sustainable producers responsive to consumer demands and market trends.

When we came to office, the gross production of our farm sector was \$6 billion. Despite the drought and other challenges, as well as the recognition of the lifestyle amenity horticulture sector, production estimates increased to more than \$9 billion this term. Due to drought, a more modest result of \$8.8 billion has been projected for this financial year.

I have good news for Queensland. Some of the highlights of our achievements include—

- record assistance provided through the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority;
- growth in the export performance of our industries such as beef, where overseas sales have increased by almost \$1 billion per annum during our time in office;
- tighter laws and more resources to prepare for, and respond to, exotic pests and diseases;
- historic reform to fisheries management to ensure the sustainability of our valuable fish stocks;
- record forest plantations and record sales by the government's forest grower, DPI Forestry, last financial year; and
- landmark animal welfare legislation has been introduced and we have led a nationally supported campaign to eradicate fire ants.

I could go on, Mr Speaker, but I seek leave to table and incorporate the rest of my statement in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Mr Speaker, the drought's grip remains firm over much of Australia. 117 shires are eligible for Queensland drought aid; and a record 95 shires and four part shires on our official drought-declared list.

Since the start of last financial year, we have provided almost \$20 million in direct financial assistance to primary producers.

In the first three-and-a-half-months of this financial year, more than \$7 million in direct financial assistance has been provided.

The Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority, which came under my ministerial responsibility in the last term, is providing record levels of assistance, including drought aid, with \$51.5 million administered last financial year (2002-03).

We have established the first regional offices for QRAA—firstly in Innisfail, Mackay, Kingaroy, then Roma and soon Toowoomba.

I successfully pushed for greater flexibility drought-affected producers accessing funds under the national Farm Management Deposit scheme.

The latest figures show some 8000 Queensland producers have \$460 million deposited in FMDs.

Mr Speaker, we have extended the export reach of Queensland products.

For every export dollar this State earns, 30 cents is from sales of the food and fibre we produce.

For example, our beef exports have increased by almost \$1 billion dollars to more than \$2 billion.

As a Government we have worked to put in place genuine reform to save the embattled sugar industry.

We have given industry control of its marketing, research and development, and terminals—with a transfer more than \$400 million in assets to industry.

We established the Agency for Food and Fibre Sciences, as the united DPI research, development and extension organisation, with full geographical, commodity and community coverage of the whole food and fibre food chain.

It conducts 900 research projects annually at a State, national and international level. AFFS collaborates with over 150 organisations and it is involved in 14 Co-operative Research Centres.

Researchers were involved in developing 45 new fruit, vegetable and field crop varieties last financial year.

These varieties and other breakthroughs are helping to improve productivity, competitiveness and sustainability of our farms.

We have also worked to improve the safe and ethical reputation of our producers.

As a Government we have tightened the laws to prevent and deal with possible outbreaks.

We have dramatically improved resources for preparedness, including \$20 million over four years to upgrade the State's defence against and preparedness for a future Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak.

We have led a nationally funded effort to eradicate one of the world's most invasive pests—the red imported fire ant—from the greater Brisbane region.

We have enacted landmark animal welfare legislation incorporating a range of codes of animal practice for our industries in law.

In terms of fisheries management, we have overseen historic reform.

Like fisheries around the world, our fisheries are under pressure.

I would like to acknowledge the work of the Member for Kurwongbah for her role as chairman of the Fishing Industry Development Council.

We have been the first Queensland Government to implement the comprehensive changes needed to ensure the sustainable future for our fish stocks and reduce conflict between the sectors.

Management plans for the coral reef fin fish, trawl, freshwater and Gulf fisheries are blueprints for fisheries around the country and the world.

John Olsen, the president of the Queensland Seafood Industry Association, recently said of the coral reef fin fish management plan and I quote:

'If you compared fisheries management with a round an oval, you could say Queensland has lapped the field.'

In terms of forestry, the State's commercialised forest grower DPI Forestry posted a record \$105.5 million in sales last financial year (2002-03).

We have overseen a significant expansion and re-establishment of our softwood plantations.

In 2002-03, 5064 hectares were planted and a record 5900 hectares is to be established this financial year.

In delivering the South East Queensland Forests Agreement, we established the 5000 hectares of hardwood plantations.

We have recommitted ourselves to a \$30 million initiative to plant another 5000 hectares over the next six years primarily on private land with the Government paying rent to participating landholders.

Compare that to when we came to office when only 3797 hectares of softwoods and no hardwoods were planted in the 1997-98 financial year.