



Speech by

**Mike Horan**

**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH**

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## **PRIMARY INDUSTRIES AND FISHERIES**

**Mr HORAN** (Toowoomba South—NPA) (11.50 am): Queensland's primary industries and fisheries have provided a core foundation to Queensland's economic development, injecting \$11 billion a year into the state's economy. In addition to securing the economic pulse of regional communities, our primary producers are also the direct custodians of much of the Queensland land estate, managing our unique landscapes for the production of environmental, cultural and aesthetic values for the benefit of all Queenslanders.

Our primary industries are now facing unprecedented complexities, including international trade barriers, low-cost competitors, pest and disease threats, a more demanding market concerned about food safety, environmental and animal welfare issues, and potentially adverse impacts of climate change. However, with challenges come opportunities, and with visionary leadership, partnerships and strategic support from government, the opportunity now exists to reposition Queensland as the leading supplier of consumer-friendly primary products.

Unfortunately, in an era when threats to sustainable primary industries have never been greater and opportunities never more pronounced, government support for Queensland's primary industries has never been weaker or more fragmented. Queensland's primary producers have been left largely to fend for themselves and, at the Labor government's insistence, departmental support has moved away from direct relationship and cooperation with our farmers and fishers.

Funding and staff levels have been stripped to the bone with the DPI&F being thrown the crumbs off the cabinet table. In 2002-03 the DPI&F's overall budget was \$352 million; now it is just \$308 million. The Queensland government's investment in the DPI&F has also fallen from \$236 million in 2002-03 to \$227 million this year. Under eight years of Labor government, about 300 of the DPI&F's most experienced staff have been shown the door via voluntary early retirements.

The cattle tick management program has been affected with the introduction of third-party providers for tick clearance, while in another move to cut costs, only frozen supplies of tick fever vaccine were made available during summer last year. Last year, the southern Queensland region faced a major shortage of stock inspectors, with vacancies going unfilled for months on end and no one available to cover when inspectors went on leave. But perhaps the greatest example of the Beattie Labor government's failure to get its priorities right is that, at a time when primary industries have been devastated by drought, cyclones and diseases such as citrus canker, Labor has been using DPI funds, as limited as they are, to sponsor opera.

A coalition government will get the priorities right for the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries and Queensland farmers and fishers. We will revive a culture of client service and reconnect with regional landholders, families and businesses involved in Queensland agriculture, commercial and recreational fishing and forestry. We will task the DPI&F with the urgent development of unique, specific visions for each of our primary industry sectors—such as horticulture, livestock, crops, commercial fishing, recreational fishing and forestry—setting out positive goals and ways to achieve these goals. This will be done in close consultation with industry groups and individual producers.

A coalition government will strengthen the regional support provided to primary producers, employing an additional 50 staff in new service delivery positions, including stock inspectors and extension specialists. These are the front-line staff to link DPI&F with the people we serve. We will ensure that resources and decision-making autonomy are passed through to regional staff. Country service will again be encouraged for career progression and Labor's purposeful downgrading of DPI&F regional offices will be reversed. A coalition government will also strengthen the investment in research and development by 20 per cent to address impediments holding back primary producers, with research advisory groups to be established to ensure that research is focused on industry needs, is practical and boosts farm margins.

In addition, the coalition will establish a biofuels unit within the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries to support agriculture's role in the development of biofuels such as ethanol. The coalition believes that Queensland should lead the nation in ethanol production and the DPI&F biofuels unit will be a powerful unit that will drive the research and development into products which can do so much for our future energy needs, regional development and farm incomes.

The Queensland coalition will immediately move to reposition Queensland as the leading supplier of high quality, consumer friendly food and fibre products in both domestic and international markets. We will re-engage with primary producers and processors along the whole value chain in growing regional and state economic prosperity and recognise their essential contribution in the management of rural landscapes.

Through the policy initiatives I have announced today, and the primary industries, fisheries and forestry policy initiatives I will announce in coming weeks, a coalition government will ensure that Queensland has a vibrant, growing primary industries, fisheries and forestry sector and we will get the priorities right.