




Speech By
Julianne Gilbert

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

Agriculture and Environment Committee, Report

 **Mrs GILBERT** (Mackay—ALP) (7.30 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Appropriation Bill 2015 and the estimates committee report of the Agriculture and Environment Committee. The Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries and Minister for Sport and Racing and the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef need to be commended for the fine work they have undertaken with their departments. Both ministers have demonstrated a solid knowledge of their budgets, portfolios and government departments. Both portfolios cover a large number of important service areas for Queensland, including agriculture, Biosecurity Queensland, sport and recreation, racing, national parks, environment protection services, species and ecosystems services and heritage and protection services.

The objective of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries is to connect industry to opportunities, enabling producers and businesses to grow their markets, secure investment, lift productivity and better manage economic and climatic adversity; manage biosecurity risks to protect agricultural resources, human health, social amenity and the environment; and provide customer-responsive services. This is being achieved. Farmers need support with research and development to produce new and emerging products to stay competitive on world markets. The minister's Department of Agriculture and Fisheries has allocated \$150,000 over two years for the development of a 10-year agriculture and food research development and extension blueprint. The minister was able to share with the estimates committee hearing that he has already tasted some of the new varieties of fruit that have been developed in Queensland to be released into the market soon.

My electorate of Mackay is surrounded by farming communities. I know that the development of different varieties of crops and new breeds of stock is very important to combat changing weather patterns and in the need to increase productivity of yields from existing land. The sustainable development of our crops will capitalise on the strength of our agricultural industry and grow our food and fibre industry. The agricultural sector has great potential to tap into the emerging Asian markets. Our farmers have the opportunity for growth in the sector and the ability to drive job creation. These initiatives in the development of the industry will be linked to the Advance Queensland initiative. In conjunction with the industry, the minister has undertaken an outbound trade mission that promoted existing food and fibre and showcased new, niche and emerging products and investment opportunities.

We are in the midst of a terrible drought, which is ripping through our agricultural centres. Currently, 80.35 per cent of our state is drought declared. The government is fulfilling its election commitment to continue existing drought arrangements until 2018 and to review existing arrangements should the wet season fail. The drought assistance package is for four years, starting from 2015-16, and it is a \$52.1 million package. The package will include freight subsidies to move fodder and water during drought, a rebate on the purchase of emergency water infrastructure and additional funding for

rural financial counselling. Also, there is relief on electricity charges for the agricultural water supply administered by Ergon. This is a stressful time for farmers and their families. This stress is realised through primary mental health support through the Royal Flying Doctor Service, which is administered by Queensland Health. The government will support initiatives for the development of a national multiperil crop insurance scheme to provide insurance cover for a range of climatic events that could result in a poor harvest, such as the drought and, in previous years, floods.

The government's state election commitment to implementing the net-free fishing zones was announced by the minister at the estimates committee hearing. During the recent consultation process the government received over 6,300 submissions. Ninety per cent of those submissions were in favour of introducing the net-free zones. Adjustments were made to some boundaries as a result of the consultation with stakeholders. The commercial fishing industry has some concerns with the implementation of the zones. That is why the state government has—

(Time expired)