




Speech By
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Record of Proceedings, 27 October 2015

MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

QUT Mackay Renewable Biocommodities Pilot Plant

 **Mrs GILBERT** (Mackay—ALP) (12.40 pm): Last week, it was a pleasure for me to join with the member for Mirani to welcome the Premier and several ministers to Mackay. We also welcomed the members for Bundaberg and Maryborough and mayors and council representatives from sugar-growing regions from across Queensland. We joined together for a detailed tour of the QUT Mackay Renewable Biocommodities Pilot Plant at Racecourse Mill. The tour was followed with a presentation from QUT's Principal Research Fellow, Ian O'Hara, to provide an insight into the developing industrial biotechnology sector, explaining the enormous opportunities for future economic growth and jobs in Queensland. I am proud to be a member of the Palaszczuk Labor government, which is working to grow new industries and jobs for regional Queensland. Sadly, over the past three years my region and other regional centres across Queensland were ignored by the previous government. The Palaszczuk Labor government has shown its commitment to growing jobs for regional Queensland by holding its first Biofutures Cabinet Committee in Mackay.

The QUT Mackay Renewable Biocommodities Pilot Plant is a unique, integrated research and development industrial biotechnology facility incorporating a biorefinery. The pilot plant tests how plant material can be turned into ethanol and other products and tests which physical and chemical conditions produce the most ethanol for the smallest cost. The process is versatile. Many different crops and crop residues can be used and products other than ethanol can be recovered or produced from the by-products. We saw firsthand the testing to turn ethanol into oil for the production of diesel. This will be great for Queensland. Fibre crops such as sunn hemp have been tested and can also have economic and agronomic benefits for canegrowers.

The QUT bioplant is available for industrial biotechnology proponents for research and development around the conversion of an enormous variety of biomass into renewable fuels and other high-value biocommodities, such as cosmetics and plastics. The facility has been developed to bridge the gap between laboratory research and commercial investment and to rapidly advance the commercialisation of new industrial biotechnologies. The plant is also designed to connect global innovators to Australian biological material suppliers, investors and end users.

The QUT pilot bioplant was completed in December 2009 at a cost of \$15 million. The costs have been funded by the then federal Labor government's biotechnology products Super Science Education Investment Fund and the Queensland Labor government's Smart State Research Facilities Fund and QUT. Labor governments at a state and federal level develop industries and jobs. The facility is hosted by Mackay Sugar Ltd, one of Australia's leading sugar manufacturers in Mackay. Two full-time QUT employees are based at the pilot bioplant to assist facility users.

The economic potential of biorefining to Queensland is substantial. In 2014, Deloitte and QUT modelled that establishing a commercial biorefinery infrastructure in North Queensland could contribute

to over \$1.8 billion a year to the state's economy by 2035, supporting over 6,000 full-time jobs. The Premier is ensuring that this becomes a reality, with her trade missions to the USA to develop new markets for biocommodity products.

The QUT biocommodities plant is also working with high schools throughout the STEM program to provide our young people with knowledge and skills to help them make the most of the exciting opportunities that await them. I was fortunate to see this firsthand, with the amazing work that is being done with students from around Mackay and other centres across the state at the pilot plant when I attended the Mackay biofuels engineering challenge earlier this year. The Queensland Palaszczuk government is ensuring that we have jobs for now and that we are also developing our students for our jobs in the future.