



Speech By  
**Stephen Bennett**


**MEMBER FOR BURNETT**

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Record of Proceedings, 15 September 2015

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL**

**Agriculture and Environment Committee, Report**

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (5.54 pm): I rise also to talk about the 2015-16 budget estimates process and in particular report No. 5 of the Agriculture and Environment Committee. I also pass on my thanks to those colleagues who took an active part in the detailed review of the budget and the other members of the committee as well.

Report No. 5 has been tabled and all can read the content and reflect otherwise on the outcomes, but my contribution particularly concerns items not in the report. We heard the Minister for Agriculture talk about net-free zones and spruik about consultation. We all nearly choked when we heard selective references to 6,000 submissions that apparently supported a vicious and sneaky policy implementation but we did not hear reference to the 5,000 signatures tabled the week before about net-free zones and opposition thereto. It will be interesting to see how the minister now reacts to the 26,000 signatures tabled this morning. We do want the minister to continue to work with the community on this issue. At least that issue was raised in the estimates process. We did not hear anything from the minister about consultation with the commercial sector, but that is what we knew. In particular, we never expected that the minister would actually consult with commercial fishermen.

We also received confirmation from both departments that there are processes in place in relation to public servants making false statements or providing misleading information. We were somewhat surprised that Minister Miles started the deliberations by raising the issue of a protection racket and saved us from even asking the question. So thank you, Minister! It was also good that the department had processes in place and had stood down public servants for making false and providing misleading statements. That was under investigation. I welcome the fact that, after some deliberations on service area 3 of Fisheries and Forestry, our state's contracted supply commitments for native forest logging will not be mucked around with. Of course, the quarrying industry can now have some confidence that it will be able to continue working.

In terms of service area 3 of Racing, while there was a lot of debate and discussion around the racing industry, there is still no indication of where the million dollars for the 20 allocated country meetings will be spent. We again reiterate our support for country racing as it is vital for rural and remote Queensland communities.

We also established that employees of the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection and the newly created Office of the Great Barrier Reef funded from the appropriation of the budget actively participated in the election campaign in the minister's own seat of Mount Coot-tha. The committee heard how royalties of \$26 million from dredging on Moreton Bay go back into government coffers. There was much discussion and information about the costs associated with new positions in the department; namely, nearly \$1 million out of the \$20 million allocated annually for the government's

plan for the Great Barrier Reef. More concerns were reported about the previous Labor government's policy of employees on the ground being known in the broader community as the 'reef police' and about commitments to reinstate the regime being on the government's agenda. Of course that will make Queenslanders, particularly country Queenslanders, very nervous.

During estimates questions we also heard of a list of agencies and groups that receive funding without going through a formal tender or procurement process. Issues around coastal hazard adaption strategies and the government policy were discussed, but clearly unintended impact on coastal communities was not prosecuted and we know that there are significant issues across Queensland with the new planning schemes now arising. The delayed responses from the minister to the member for Hervey Bay in terms of urgently requesting action on the cancellation of permits to dispose of sea scallops and the endangering of 50 jobs still have not been resolved.

I am particularly disappointed in the response to a question from the member for Mount Isa regarding flying fox management that indicated the minister's complete lack of understanding. If the minister had taken the time to talk to those in the industry who utilise the currently existing mitigation practices, he would have found significant success in an LNP management process that should not be altered.

The committee heard about the activity of coal seam gas and the land spraying of drill mud process that has increased significantly under the new minister's regime. Of course, different regulatory frameworks appear to have decreased surveillance in monitoring, particularly in the gas fields in western Queensland. I was pleased to see disappear the hysteria proposed by those opposite in the lead-up to the election regarding grazing on state controlled land and national parks. We thank the minister for that confirmation, considering that emergency grazing and drought conditions prevail in Queensland. The minister's sensible response regarding the management of buffel grass is a significant change in policy, and we welcome those comments. The issue of grazing leases over state forest was discussed, and we acknowledge the conversations had around key stakeholders that are affected. Of course, the minister's commitment in estimates that no changes will be introduced will help many nervous farming families ensure a sustainable future for primary industries.