




Speech By  
**Ann Leahy**

**MEMBER FOR WARREGO**

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

 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (8.36 pm): I am delighted to speak on report No. 20 of the Agriculture and Environment Committee. However, I am disappointed by the lack of plans to grow agricultural profitability in the state of Queensland. I would like to thank all of the departmental staff who have prepared and participated in the estimates committee process for the Agriculture and Environment Committee estimates hearings.

I did a search of the Service Delivery Statements for a mention of 'profitability in agriculture'. It only appears once in the 52-page statements. In many parts of the state, food and fibre producers cannot increase their productivity. They are actively seeking ways to increase the profitability of their businesses so they can meet the challenges presented by climate variations and be competitive in a world market. I note in the budget highlights that in conjunction with industry, the minister will undertake outbound trade missions showcasing Queensland's agricultural products, expertise and areas for investment in agriculture and the food and fibre supply chain. There are large populations of macropods in South-West Queensland and I take the opportunity to highlight the need for trade missions to be focussed on seeking markets for macropods—

**Mr Rickuss:** Better tell them what a macropod is. They probably don't know.

**Ms LEAHY:** I will take the interjection from the member for Lockyer. Macropods are kangaroos. In some cases macropods are causing drought conditions. They are breeding like a rabbit plague. They are causing environmental damage and competing for scarce pasture during drought times and when it does rain. Rather than disposing of the macropods, it would be a much better outcome to find a market for their products. They produce a wonderful leather and they are a cholesterol-free meat. The state government can do much more to find markets for macropod products. The minister needs to focus some of the government's trade efforts on the macropod industry and products. It does not matter if it is steak, leather, salami or a 'roo-bana'; we need to find a market.

I note the state budget allocates funds jointly with the federal government to construct cluster fencing in central and South-West Queensland to help keep out the scourge of wild dogs. Wild dog numbers are the highest they have ever been. They, too, seem to be breeding worse than a rabbit plague in some areas. I am advised that in the last financial year scalp numbers in the Murweh shire were some 3,000; Tambo shire, 2,500; Barcaldine shire, 3,000; the Maranoa Regional Council, 2,800; and the Paroo shire, 88. There are not enough biosecurity officers and I am advised that the position in Cunnamulla is actually vacant. The LNP government put on five wild dog officers on the front line and I am advised that there are two left under this Labor government.

I would have thought that a government which was focused on increasing the number of public servants and the Public Service would have at least filled the front-line positions that take the fight up to the wild dog menace. It is important to acknowledge that the federal government has also provided the lion's share of funding for cluster fencing in central and south-west Queensland, and I thank them

for their commitment. Again in the estimates process there was an opportunity for the government to explain their plans for the Queensland Rural and Adjustment Authority and its intention to revamp QRAA to the new Queensland Rural Industry Development Authority. This is a missed opportunity to explain how the changes will benefit agricultural industries and grow the profitability of the sector.

I am also rather interested in the government's establishment of the Office of Rural Affairs with a proposed budget of \$2 million. Just out of interest, if you use the rate of \$2,240, which is the maximum subsidy provided to landholders for cluster fencing, that \$2 million would build some 892 kilometres of cluster fence or, to put it in comparison, two Morven-sized cluster fences or two Bulloo Shire linear fences, which is currently being investigated by an active group of landholders in the Bulloo Shire with assistance from the Bulloo Shire Council.

What are the key objectives of this office, where will it be based and will the commissioner be full time or part time? I hope the office will be based near or in a community that does not have traffic lights. The government did advise that the new office will cost \$250,000 in new money and \$250,000 in kind over four years. Given the likely salary package of the commissioner and on-costs, including extensive travel, I hope the commissioner has been given a good fuel card, as they will need it to move effectively about rural and regional Queensland.