




Speech By  
**Dale Last**

**MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN**

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

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (8.17 pm): I rise to speak to the Agriculture and Environment Committee's budget estimates report. The recent budget brought down by the Palaszczuk Labor government has confirmed what many of us have known since those opposite assumed government in Queensland. That is that agriculture is at the bottom of the pile when it comes to funding and support. With spending cuts of 2½ per cent and little in the way of major new projects, I have significant concerns over the Palaszczuk government's commitment to agriculture and fisheries and the delivery of key, front-line services that our primary industries need.

Estimates showed this government's most junior minister has little grasp of industry issues and time and again was unable to provide direct answers to simple questions, constantly deferring to departmental staff during the hearing. The minister failed to clearly answer what consultation had been undertaken with Queensland's 18½ thousand to 19,000 commercial beef and dairy producers regarding her decision to dump Queensland's protected zone status for bovine Johne's disease.

Clear advice and wishes of the Queensland dairy industry were totally ignored and the minister was unable to point to any genuine consultation with the broader beef industry despite having the database at her disposal to do so. The decision and the failure to properly consult stands as lazy and reckless with the minister unable to provide any assurance to allay fears BJD will spread into clean herds because of her decision.

The tick line was another biosecurity issue where the minister was found wanting, not just on policy but on lack of consultation and listening to landholders along the line, particularly those who have invested a lot of time and money in dealing with ticks. This continues to be a significant issue for those graziers who border the tick line and a major impost for those property owners previously deemed clean who now find themselves on the infected side of the fence.

The response by the minister regarding the containment and eradication of fire ants in Queensland highlights the challenges facing our state. While national funding for eradication looks to be continuing for the foreseeable future, there is no fallback plan for containment and what that will mean for Queensland taxpayers.

The department's capital budget is based around maintenance and some upgrades. Allocations are there for a research farm in partnership with GRDC and for the RSPCA for facility upgrades.

The minister seems content on wasting scarce resources with her new \$2 million Office of Rural Affairs when there is no charter and no idea whether its 'commissioner' will work full-time or part-time, let alone what any staff would actually do, with the minister revealing funding would be \$250,000 in new money and \$250,000 'in kind' a year over four years. With the commissioner's salary and oncosts, there will be nothing left for any staff or resources to undertake any real work. Furthermore, there was no

indication from the minister on where this office or commissioner would be based which hardly inspires confidence that this initiative will actually deliver results for the rural sector.

Following budget estimates, I have grave concerns regarding the future of the fishing industry in Queensland. The minister conveniently released a fisheries green paper the day before estimates which was an insult to stakeholders, particularly in the commercial seafood industry. Whilst the minister attempted to spruik the benefits of her green paper, it was readily apparent that dark clouds are on the horizon for the seafood industry in Queensland. The fact that the minister indicated in her response that she would implement a net-free zone in Moreton Bay when she was good and ready highlights the arrogance of this government and its contempt for the fishing industry.

The online feedback pages, with their simplistic motherhood questions, are aimed at drawing readers to tick and approve a policy shift that is little more than a reallocation of fish stocks without a shred of supporting scientific data. The new policy to slash commercial and rec fishing takes by 40 to 50 per cent threatens many businesses and hundreds of jobs in regional Queensland.

Plans for QRAA and its revamp into the new Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority, QRIDA, highlighted the lack of thought given to the federal government's plans for a Regional Investment Corporation to administer drought and hardship concessional loans which would render redundant much of what QRAA and its 100-odd staff currently do.

The figures speak for themselves. This government has cut spending in the agricultural, fisheries and forestry industries at a time when these industries have the potential to pull this state out of the economic doldrums that it finds itself in. Instead of grasping the opportunity to develop agribusiness in this state, the minister has reaffirmed the status of agriculture as the poor cousin in this do-nothing government.