



Speech By  
**Dale Last**


**MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN**

---

Record of Proceedings, 8 November 2016

**MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST**

**Agriculture Industry**

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (12.02 pm): This state was built on the back of agriculture, yet today in this place we have witnessed nothing short of breathtaking hypocrisy. Earlier today, the Premier stood in this place and said that agriculture is essential to promoting more jobs. If the agricultural industry is so essential, why am I standing here today looking at the vacant seat that should be occupied by the minister for agriculture? Since the departure of the member for Bundaberg last week, the Premier still has not appointed a minister for agriculture, fisheries and forestry. Instead, she has foisted this portfolio on the minister for police and corrective services to handle until a cabinet reshuffle takes place. Are we to believe that the member for Rockhampton will devote the time and resources that are necessary to take this portfolio forward? Earlier today, we heard the 'minister for everything' say, 'This government will continue to support our farmers.' Really? Is it any wonder that our agricultural industry bodies have expressed dismay at the way this government continues to put agriculture at the bottom of the pile. I ask the minister: what exactly will he be doing to support our farmers?

Australian farmers produce more than 90 per cent of Australian daily domestic food supply and agricultural produce accounts for 60 per cent in volume in total agricultural production. In Queensland, agricultural land occupies close to 1.5 million square kilometres, or around about 84 per cent of the state. Queensland is Australia's largest supplier of beef products and is renowned for producing high-quality and safe beef products. Based on the gross value of agricultural production, the state's cattle industry is worth around \$5 billion. Ninety-five per cent of Australian sugar that is produced comes from Queensland, with the sugar industry being one of Queensland's largest agricultural crops, with about 85 per cent of the raw sugar produced in this state being exported, generating up to \$2 billion in export earnings. The latest *State of Queensland agriculture report* states that the total gross value of Queensland's fishery production was more than \$279 million, with fisheries product exports valued at just over \$170 million. The report also shows that the value of Queensland's aquaculture production has increased by nine per cent, to more than \$89 million, with prawn and barramundi farms accounting for the largest share of production value.

I can say to the Premier that the agricultural sector is essential to promoting more jobs. It is our biggest employer in rural and regional communities. It is estimated that the state's agriculture, forestry and fishing sector employs close to 60,000 people. If we consider all of those employed in the input and output sectors, food manufacturing and processing, distribution and retail, agriculture provides employment to many tens of thousands of Queenslanders. It has many important linkages with other sectors of the economy. The knock-on effects of successful agricultural production boosts many sectors.

The benefits to Queensland from agriculture are not all fiscal. Farmers have also led the sustainability surge, placing important emphasis on natural resource management. Farmers work relentlessly in areas such as weed prevention, pest, land, soil, natural vegetation and water related issues. Farmers also invest heavily in research and development so that they may be a step ahead of international competitors to get the best from the land and contribute to the economy.

Queensland farmers make important economic and environmental contributions to the state and the nation. They are at the forefront of pioneering new technology and practices to aid their efficiency and competitiveness. Agriculture in Queensland continues to be a driving force, creating new jobs, boosting the economy and encouraging innovation. The ability for agriculture to service a platform for future economic growth in Queensland is grounded in a number of key global trends and developments, including a rapidly expanding population, the market access advantage that Australia has through its geographic proximity to Asia, a strong reputation for safe, high-quality produce and produce that has the potential to achieve a price premium.

I believe in the agricultural, fisheries and forest industry sector. I make no apologies for being a passionate advocate for our farmers, fishing and forestry workers and rural producers. If we are to grow our agricultural sector in Queensland, which has the potential to grow significantly over the medium and long term, we need to support this industry. My challenge to the Premier is simply this: if she is serious about this portfolio, she will demonstrate her government's commitment to agriculture, fisheries and forestry by appointing a minister to show people in the regions—in the bush, our farmers, graziers, fishermen, canefarmers and forestry workers—that her government values them and will invest in the agricultural sector.