




Speech By
Deb Frecklington

MEMBER FOR NANANGO

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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

**Palaszczuk Labor Government, Swickers Kingaroy Bacon Factory, Fire;
Unemployment**

 **Mrs FRECKLINGTON** (Nanango—LNP) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (11.52 am): It is interesting to note that some 48 hours after the disaster that came upon Kingaroy on Sunday morning this Labor government has made its first statement in relation to it. In fact, this was a disaster that enabled the disaster management committee to meet. It first met at 3 pm on Sunday and it was incredible that during that meeting a state government local department said that it was unable to contribute to the conversation because it was a Sunday. Unfortunately, this disaster did befall on a Sunday in my electorate. There was a fire in the boning room at Swickers pork factory. The fire destroyed the boning room, distribution area and the chillers. This is Australia's largest pork processing plant. It processes 96 per cent of the pork that comes out of Queensland and processes between 18,000 to 20,000 pigs a week. Thankfully no workers or anyone else was injured. I want to personally thank all of the emergency workers and the 60 firefighters involved who worked not only through the day but through the night. Swickers is our biggest employer, with up to 600 workers, and this fire has caused much angst across the wider community.

I have been heartened by the assurances from the chief executive of Swickers who has told company workers that he is hoping to have the plant or part of the plant back online within a week. I also welcome the assurance from Swickers that all employees will be paid for the week, obviously using an averaging strategy. I also welcome assurances from Swickers that it will meet obligations to its consumers and producers to get the business back to normal as quickly as possible in the lead-up to Christmas. This is important not only for the workers and their families within Kingaroy but also for pork farmers across the wider Darling Downs and the Burnett areas. As I noted earlier, many regional communities are doing it tough and regional centres rely on major facilities like this to keep our communities going.

This morning we have also heard a bit about the Deloitte Queensland Business Outlook and what it says about our state's future. One thing that I think deserves our full attention in this House is what the report says about regional development and the ongoing issue of job security in many parts of the state. The report notes the emergence of the tale of two Queenslands and it is a tale that is not particularly good for regional parts of Queensland. A large gap has emerged between unemployment in South-East Queensland and the rest of Queensland. That gap is only getting wider. For the benefit of members, this is what this Deloitte Access report says—

Two years ago, the unemployment rate in Greater Brisbane and the rest of Queensland was almost the same. But over the last two years, this has diverged.

We all know what has happened in the last two years. What has happened to this great state of Queensland has been this failed Labor Palaszczuk government! The unemployment rate for the rest of Queensland is listed as 6.6 per cent. The reality is that the unemployment rate in many regional communities is far higher than that. Places like Townsville and outback Queensland are doing it particularly tough. In the last 12 months we have seen almost 10,000 jobs disappear from the Townsville region. Outback Queensland, which takes in central and western parts of our state, has fared even worse. More than 12,000 jobs have disappeared from the outback in the last year. The unemployment rate has increased by eight per cent. The youth unemployment rate is almost 35 per cent. In Cairns one in four people cannot find a job.

Clearly many regional communities are feeling the effects of slower activity, particularly as investment in our major resources projects continues to decline. The decline in investment is evidenced by the fact that engineering construction has declined every single quarter under this Palaszczuk Labor government. Business investment has also declined by \$12 billion in the last financial year. We know that regional parts of our state are doing it tough. Infrastructure spending has been slashed by this lazy government and private sector investment is going backwards. We know that this government, like when the disaster struck Kingaroy on Sunday, was completely lacking—nowhere to be seen—because it was in regional Queensland.

(Time expired)