




Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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ADJOURNMENT

Western Queensland, Prickly Acacia

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (6.56 pm): I rise to bring to the House's attention the urgent need to continue to fund prickly acacia so that we can continue to fight against this weed of national significance. The western part of Gregory is home to the iconic Mitchell grass. This is the largest natural grassy ecosystem in Australia. As such, it is as unique and significant as the Daintree or the reef. It is also the catchment for Lake Eyre, so the infestation of this ecosystem by the prickly acacia tree is a tragedy. A native of Africa, it was introduced into Queensland in 1926. By 1957, it was declared a noxious weed and from 2000 to 2015 the infestation has tripled in size. Some 23 million hectares of Mitchell grass is infested. Even sunlight cannot penetrate the established stands of prickly acacia. In a grass ecosystem, this is a disaster. Where prickly acacia goes, we can lose up to 100 per cent of our natural grasses. There goes the habitats and some of our precious native birds and animals. The feed for our cattle and sheep also goes. Some 25 rare animal species are currently threatened and two plant communities are endangered. There is also the productive loss of one of the finest organic beef pastures in the world.

Adapting old and new technologies is the answer to the situation. NRM group Desert Channels turned to drones and satellite mapping to penetrate previously impenetrable thickets and precisely apply residual herbicide, even into the centre. This was all of course started by the former natural resources minister, Andrew Cripps, who did a great job in understanding that prickly acacia needs to be eradicated from central-western Queensland. In just three years some 50 million trees have been killed bringing a 600 per cent increase in grass coverage, a 500 per cent increase in grass biomass and a 300 per cent increase in grass species. In addition, 142,000 hectares of native habitat have been restored and 600 kilometres of streamline vegetation has been protected.

Desert Channels Queensland has been delivering on-ground results in the last three years. It has done so with little support from Biosecurity Queensland and the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection. It has done so on the smell of an oily rag and has proved eradication, not control, can be our goal. Instead of applause, here we go again putting out our begging bowl pleading for funds to continue the fight. There have been numerous community meetings with hundreds of landholders. In fact, 430 landholders signed a petition seeking this government's support. I call on the minister and I call on the Palaszczuk government to continue funding this important program. It is clearing up the prickly acacia in central-western Queensland and providing an opportunity for us to increase production out there to get the sheep and beef cattle production that we need in the central west to deliver the economic growth we want in Queensland. I call on the minister to continue to fund Desert Channels in order to eradicate prickly acacia.