




Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

Record of Proceedings, 1 November 2016

APPROPRIATION BILL (NO. 2)

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (2.52 pm): I too rise to make a short contribution to the Appropriation Bill (No. 2) 2016. For those members on the committee it was important that we were able to talk to the Under Treasurer about the Appropriation Bill, which was introduced by the Treasurer on 13 September. The bill proposes to provide for supplementary appropriation for unforeseen expenditure that occurred during the 2015-16 financial year and the bill will authorise the Treasurer to pay \$390.1 million. Unforeseen expenditure occurs when a department exceeds its approved budget and the Treasurer needs to have additional payments from the Consolidated Fund approved.

This also gives me an opportunity to talk about the budget and money that has been allocated in the budget for the 2015-16 financial year but has not been spent, something that is of great concern to me and great concern to Western Queensland. I am talking about the announcement on May Day this year by the Premier of a second tranche of funding worth \$5 million to build more check fencing for wild dogs. It is exactly six months ago, on 1 May, that the Premier flew out to Barcaldine and announced this great new package, another \$5 million for cluster fencing, which we all welcomed. Cluster fencing was first established under the former minister for natural resources Andrew Cripps for the South West NRM. We saw some fantastic projects in the Tambo-Blackall area of cluster fencing as a result of that money that the former minister for natural resources Andrew Cripps provided which saw lambing rates increase from 20 per cent to nearly 100 per cent. I note that the member for Ipswich West is in the House. He came out to Longreach and saw cluster fencing and the fantastic opportunities that cluster fencing provides for Western Queensland.

While talking about the Appropriation Bill and looking at extra funding and unforeseen expenditure, I point out that we need to make sure that we have programs funded. I call on the Labor Party and I call on the Minister for Agriculture to fund the cluster fencing that they promised—the \$5 million that they promised six months ago. Not one dollar has hit the ground. Not one dollar has got out there. It was announced on May Day. They went out to Barcaldine to celebrate Labour Day to talk about the Shearers' Strike, to talk about the history of the Labor Party. They made an announcement of \$5 million for cluster fencing six months ago and not one dollar has hit the ground. Not one dollar has made its way to RAPAD; not one dollar has made its way to South West NRM. I think it is absolutely appalling that members opposite can go out there, make an announcement on May Day and say that they are going to spend \$5 million on cluster fencing and not even put one dollar on the ground. We have 11 clusters ready to go. We had 19 clusters funded from the last \$5 million that was announced and 19 clusters are up and going. Work is being undertaken on cluster fencing, yet of the \$5 million they announced six months ago, not one dollar has left their hands; not one dollar has hit the ground.

With the first round oversubscribed, I could not have been more delighted when that was announced. Since then many members would be aware that I have been constantly asking: where is the money? We have not seen one red cent and there is no clear explanation why. Then during the last sitting week, on 13 October, the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries delivered a ministerial statement

announcing that she was siphoning half a million dollars from that funding—that \$5 million—to set up a panel to investigate a contingent loan scheme. We do not need any more studies. We do not need any more paperwork. We do not need any more bureaucrats going over and over this. The program we have in place there is working. A total of 19 clusters have been put up in the central west. It is working. The Premier went out to Sandy and Amelia Williams's place earlier this year and sat around their coffee table. They are now putting up a cluster fence themselves through this funding. It is working. Why is the minister not delivering the money? Please deliver the money.

Many of these producers have had little or no income over the years of drought and would struggle to put the capital together. I am perplexed; I am completely confused as to why we are looking at another loan scheme, another layer of bureaucracy. As both the minister and I well know, her agency QRAA is already providing low-interest loans for this purpose and the Longreach Regional Council in my electorate have done the ground work to set up a scheme for landholders in that district. They are waiting for this to go ahead from the government to get it up.

As the local member, this is a passionate interest for me and I am greatly offended that the minister then accuses me of petty politics over the funding when her own ministerial statement left key questions from my constituents completely unanswered. I speak of core issues such as how big is this panel? Who will be on it? Can she clearly and simply state the purpose of this panel? What are the terms of reference? How long will it take to report? Will the remainder of the funding be held back until it does report? Lastly, why should the process be so costly that it hoovers up half a million dollars worth of subsidies that the Premier intended to build fences? Remember the Premier came out six months ago, on May Day, and said, 'Cluster fencing is working. Let's continue to see it work. Here's another \$5 million of funding to put in more cluster fencing.' Where is it? It is not there. That was six months ago and not one red cent has left the Labor government's hands to be delivered for cluster fencing in the central west and the south-west. Of course the ministerial statements are a great way to make a vague announcement without pesky journalists asking questions about these core issues and by and large the minister has gotten away with it.

This is why I am asking these questions today. I am asking these questions on behalf of my constituents who wonder if the money even exists or if the minister is covering up the fact that it has been spent elsewhere. I ask because RAPAD has fencing ready to roll. It is spring, we have had some rain and there are dog tracks everywhere. In her letter to the *North Queensland Register* the minister implied that I was somehow irresponsible in the way I want these taxpayer funds expended.

Dr Rowan: The minister does not care!

Mr MILLAR: No, I do not think the minister does care. I take that interjection from the member for Moggill, who was out in the central west with me last week looking at prickly acacia. This is another issue, because prickly acacia funding is coming to an end in the next financial year and there has been no sign whatsoever that they will continue prickly acacia funding. It is working out there because we are using drones and it is actually making an impact. This is serious.

I ask the Treasurer to ask the Minister for Agriculture why it has taken six months for the \$5 million that was announced May Day to get out to Western Queensland producers. It has not been received. Only 10 minutes before I came into this House I was on the phone to ask the question again, 'Has the money turned up?' I asked people out there and they said, 'No, it has not turned up.' What is also of concern is that the minister made a vague statement in the media that she is going to be calling for expressions of interest, but we do not need a separate process. RAPAD already has a program in place. They have 11 clusters ready to go; all they want is the barbed wire, the fencing and the posts. They have the employment to put these fences up. Let's get on with it!

The wild dog problem must be one of the most overdone examples of government red tape ever, and this is something that has continued to be an issue. First of all previous Labor governments flick passed the issue of feral animal control to local governments, so all of my councils have had to put on extra staff. The other grassroots experts are NRM groups like SWRED in the member for Warrego's electorate and RAPAD in my own. These people are doing a great job. With their share of the first round of funding RAPAD has generated cluster fencing for 95 properties. This is approximately 1,800 kilometres of fencing which will protect 1.2 million hectares, which represents half a million sheep. When we went up towards Muttaborra at the property Weewondilla, the member for Ipswich West saw the fantastic effort that Boyd Webb and his family have put into cluster fencing. The lambing rates have increased from 20 per cent to 100 per cent, and that means more sheep on the ground, more shearers in the central west and more income to spend in the towns.

Let us get out the \$5 million that the Premier announced on May Day, six months ago. Do not wait any further; get it out. Get on the phone today and release the money. Ring RAPAD and ring South West NRM and say, 'Here is the money. I am sorry it is delayed. I am sorry it took six months.' With

their share of the first round of founding RAPAD has generated cluster fencing for 95 properties, as I said, so that is half a million sheep. The flock means that more than \$6 million in wages is injected into the district, which is a 234 per cent return on the government's investment. Furthermore, RAPAD has done this with very trim administrative costs that equate to only 7.5 per cent of the monies in administration costs, which is very low. They are making sure that they put more of the money out there in the paddock, which is hardly to be called reckless.

What is questionable are the layers of oversight that the minister has installed above this level: naturally there is a departmental group which the Premier referred to her in her May Day speech; above them we have two wild dog commissioners; and then over or alongside them—I am not really sure how it works—the minister also has an 11-person QDOG panel. They are all calling for this money to get out. We heard Vaughan Johnson, the former member for Gregory, who said, 'Get this money out now.' The Minister for Agriculture is creating another panel. We are now on the countdown to Christmas and we still have not seen the money for more fences. In my electorate Robbie Chandler, the mayor of Barcaldine and chair of RAPAD, and his team have 11 fences set to roll now. Those 11 fences would protect an extra 135,000 sheep, creating more than \$1.6 million in associated wages for the district.

The minister needs to do her job. At the moment it looks like the minister could not organise a choko vine over an outhouse. The agriculture minister tries to treat our graziers and those out in the central west as fools. Her claims about wild dogs and the handling of funds do not match the facts. Let us be honest: when the LNP came to government in 2012 there was no department of agriculture. Public servants dealing with primary industries were buried deep in the bowels of Labor's sprawling and directionless Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation. The height of this ideology was Labor's crazy requirement that bait meat for wild dogs be of 'human consumption' grade. I am not kidding, as any grazier who has had to deal with this madness knows. The LNP scrapped that and focused on supporting individuals, local grazing communities and shires to get back on track with baiting, shooting and trapping programs with commonsense changes to baits, including commercial baits and support for fencing programs. Most importantly, the minister for natural resources in the LNP, Andrew Cripps, started cluster fencing. It has made a significant change to the central west and there is optimism that we have not seen for a long time because this fencing is working. This fencing is creating buoyant optimism for the wool industry, which has been in a crisis since 1990. Now we have wool prices at around 1,400 cents a kilogram clean for 21 and 22 micron.

It is absolutely essential that we get this money out. I stand by the efforts made by the LNP government. I also stand by my call for Minister Donaldson to stop wasting time and money on any more studies. Get the state and federal fencing funds out the door to landholders who are waiting to go with these projects. Minister Donaldson would do well to listen to similar advice from my predecessor, and now wild dog commissioner, Vaughan Johnson. I call on the Treasurer, I call on cabinet and I call on the Labor Party to get this money out. There was \$5 million announced on May Day, six months ago. Not one red cent has hit the ground. Get the money out and get it out fast!