




Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

Record of Proceedings, 15 February 2017

MOTION

Military Training Areas

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (5.37 pm): I rise to oppose the motion before the House. This just proves that you do not need to be swanning around in front of a TV camera and big-noting yourself to achieve an outcome for this state. Whilst this minister was out there barking like a mad dog, those on this side of the House were working behind the scenes to ensure the right outcome for our farmers. It was the combined efforts of those members on this side of the House that got this decision overturned.

I am on the public record as saying that this decision by the federal government was ill-conceived and needed to be overturned. I worked with the Deputy Prime Minister, staff in his office and two LNP senators to make sure that this decision was reviewed and overturned. I was never going to support the compulsory acquisition of 23 properties at Charters Towers and 37 at Shoalwater Bay, running a combined herd of up to 100,000 head of cattle and covering an area of land comprising 167,000 hectares at Charters Towers and 152,000 hectares at Shoalwater Bay with the potential expansion area of 46,000 hectares. I know the land around Charters Towers intimately, having lived and worked in that area for four years. Yes, it does comprise prime agriculture land—fattening country, as they call it in the industry. Whilst there are two confirmed property owners that have signed up to sell, namely Lyndon and Glenprairie, this is a decision for those property owners to make and it is a decision that should be voluntary, not forced.

I will always support our graziers. There was no way I was going to sit back and watch this prime agricultural land be de-stocked and locked up forever for use by Defence. As I said then and I say again now, there is plenty of marginal country in this state which is better suited to the needs of the Defence Force. I know of one 287,000-hectare block of marginal country south of Pentland better suited for this purpose and which the owner wants to sell. We have also heard of land on Cape York Peninsula. If the Defence Force is required to drive some distance to access these training areas, then so be it.

Of course we welcome the Singaporean Defence Force to train in Australia, but not at the expense of our prime agricultural land. The Australian Defence Force needs to go back to the drawing board and identify marginal land that will have a minimal impact on our cattle industry. Let me remind the minister that in 2011 it was the former federal Labor minister for agriculture, Joe Ludwig, who destroyed the live cattle export industry in Australia, costing the industry hundreds of millions of dollars and thousands of jobs. It was a decision which decimated the entire northern cattle industry and sent property owners bankrupt overnight. Many of these graziers are still recovering to this day.

Mrs Frecklington: They are still hurting!

Mr LAST: That is right. Those on that side of the House have a hide claiming the high moral ground on this issue, when the skeletons in their closet clearly show their absolute disdain and contempt for farmers and their pathetic record when it comes to looking after our people on the land. We need look no further than the vegetation management laws, which were so vigorously opposed in this place last year and which the Deputy Premier has stated she will overturn if they are returned to government.

Those on that side of the House do not care about our rural communities. They do not care about the future of agriculture in Queensland. It is nothing short of hypocritical for this minister to come into this place and try to make out that the red left is suddenly the farmer's friend. There is a huge difference between those on that side of the House and on those on this side of the House. This issue highlights that we can get the job done and we will stand up for our farmers come hell or high water. That is exactly what we have done in this instance. We achieved an outcome whilst you were out there grandstanding and we got the work done behind the scenes. Who do you think got the Deputy Prime Minister to Rockhampton? Go and ask him.

There is no question that the LNP is the friend of the farmer; we always have been and we always will be. This case has highlighted that when it is necessary we will stand shoulder to shoulder with them and back them all the way.