



Speech By  
**Dale Last**


**MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN**

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Record of Proceedings, 24 October 2017

**MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST**

**Agriculture**

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (2.32 pm): Our agricultural sector contributes \$60 billion to Queensland, with 282,000 people employed in agriculture and our associated food supply chain. With that contribution from the agricultural sector, one would assume it would be a high-profile, high-priority portfolio. Yet when I look across the chamber all I see is a vacant chair where the minister for agriculture should be sitting.

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Mr LAST:** Perhaps we have someone auditioning for the role today.

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Ms Farmer): Order! Honourable members, let us allow the member for Burdekin to continue.

**Mr LAST:** It reaffirms what those on this side of the House have been saying for three years, and that is this government treats the agriculture portfolio as the poor cousin. We saw it in the budget this year when they cut spending and we are seeing it again today. They are so focused on trying to fix up the rail debacle and transport issues in the south-east of the state that they have completely taken their eye off the ball when it comes to agriculture.

This is an industry that generates a lot of revenue for this state. This is an industry that generates jobs, including tens of thousands of seasonal jobs in the horticultural sector each year, and the future could not be brighter. Here we have a Premier talking up the importance of agriculture to Queensland and yet when it comes to having a minister sitting in that seat representing the agricultural sector in Queensland, flying the flag for all our hardworking farmers, they are found wanting. What a disappointment. Is it the case that the Premier could not be bothered filling the vacancy left by the member for Rockhampton, or is it simply that they do not have anyone capable enough in the party to take on that important role?

**Mr Butcher** interjected.

**Mr LAST:** There are plenty over there who are wanting to audition for the role. The member for Gladstone has his eye on the role by the looks of it. Right now we have some very important issues to deal with in agriculture—issues such as the Panama TR4 outbreak at Tully.

**Mr Butcher** interjected.

**Mr Bleijie** interjected.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Ms Farmer): Order! If the member for Gladstone and the member for Kawana would like to have a conversation, please take it outside the chamber.

**Mr LAST:** There are issues such as the white spot disease in prawns, the ongoing drought in Western Queensland, wild dog control and spiralling electricity prices for irrigation. I could go on. However, of more concern is the lack of leadership for a sector that contributes so much. Is it any wonder that our industry groups—AgForce, QFF, Canegrowers Queensland, Cotton Australia, Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation and Growcom, to name a few—have questioned the lack of vision, lack of resources and lack of any real commitment for agriculture from this do-nothing government?

Here we are on the cusp of an election and our peak industry bodies are being forced to wait in the wings and deal with an already overloaded Minister for Natural Resources and Mines, who, with no disrespect intended, would not have a clue about the agriculture, fisheries and forestry industries in this state. Let us not forget the 2,000-plus hardworking staff in the department who must be wondering what they have done to deserve such poor treatment at the hands of this government.

If ever we needed confirmation that this government is treading water and going nowhere, we need look no further than the debacle which is unfolding in the agriculture portfolio at the moment. The question that needs to be asked—and I am happy to ask the question on behalf of all our farmers, fishermen and forestry workers—is when will the Premier step up to the plate and fill the vacant agriculture ministry role? While that role remains unfilled, agriculture, fishing and forestry in Queensland is not getting the attention that it deserves and capitalising on the opportunities that exist right now.

Our primary industries need stability for investment. They need strong leadership and they need common-sense policies and regulatory settings to help them get on with the job of producing high-quality food and fibres that domestic international customers want. The LNP has steadfastly stood by our farmers, fishermen and forestry workers, and we will continue to take up the fight on their behalf for a fair go. We fought off Labor's ideologically driven attempt to tear down our common-sense vegetation management framework. We have stood by our 4,000 canefarmers, their families and their communities and delivered sugar marketing choice—against Labor's disgraceful siding with monopoly foreign owned millers. We have fought against Labor's mindless policies that led to skyrocketing power and water charges, and we have outlined a common-sense plan to address these failures. The Premier stood in this place earlier today and said that she was happy to be known as the farmers' friend. I am sure there are a lot of farmers around Queensland right now saying, 'With friends like you, who needs enemies?'