




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

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**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL:
AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

 **Mr BUTCHER** (Gladstone—ALP) (7.58 pm): I rise tonight to contribute to the estimates debate that we are having for the Agriculture and Environment Committee. It was a pleasure to be part of that committee as the chair in the previous 12 months before that, so it is great to be here tonight talking about it. As a former chair of the committee, I still pay close attention to the goings-on and the great work that the Palaszczuk government is doing with agriculture and fisheries in this state. In my maiden speech, I reflected on the fact that 'agriculture continues to play an important role in the Gladstone economy' and that 'primary producers are at the mercy of Mother Nature and it is important that these areas are supported by government outside times of crisis'.

The Labor government has supported our primary producers in times of drought and in assisting producers to tackle the wild dog problem in our western communities, and I had the pleasure of visiting some of those communities talking about wild dogs in my role as chair. I note that page 7 of the SDS highlights that the government will—

Continue to assist regional collectives and landholders to better control weeds and pest animals affecting regional communities including:

- construct cluster fencing to control wild dogs

This government commitment has helped facilitate over 5,000 kilometres of exclusion fencing. This fencing is having a real impact on bringing sheep back to Western Queensland. Furthermore, the Queensland government has also provided a one-off loan of \$18 million to the Longreach Regional Council that will lead to the construction of 2½ thousand kilometres of fencing to protect 900,000 hectares of productive grazing land from wild dog predation.

According to the Longreach Regional Council, this fencing will result in a further increase of 200,000 sheep in the Longreach region over the next five years and a potential increase of over 130 jobs in the region along with a potential population boost of around 500 people related to the sheering, crutching, contracting, lamb marking and associated sheep and animal husbandry jobs. The minister reflected on the delivery of Labor's election commitment. He stated—

We said that government might like to do something to encourage fencing programs going forward. That is what we took to the election and we have put more money into that going forward. Premier Palaszczuk has been incredibly enthusiastic about supporting Western Queensland and supporting the wool and sheep sectors. We think there is real merit and opportunity going forward, not only in the traditional wool area but also in protein production.

This year's budget includes an additional \$1.25 million which is allocated to drought affected landholders to better control weeds and pest animals. The Palaszczuk government has met and exceeded the election commitment on wild dogs and in many of those electorates they welcome the investment that this government has made to biosecurity that will have a benefit for many years to come.

I have no doubt that the Sustainable Fisheries Strategy announced as part of the 2017 budget—and the minister was there in Gladstone with me to make the announcement—will also have a lasting legacy. It is a plan to reform management of Queensland fisheries to ensure that they are viable for future generations to enjoy in this wonderful state on the east coast. The Palaszczuk government has committed more than \$30 million to help implement this strategy, and \$20.3 million of that is brand-new money into Queensland. This funding will ensure that Fisheries Queensland will be able to transform its data collection and research capability.

I am delighted that as part of this reform there will be a 20 per cent increase in the number of Boating and Fisheries Patrol officers in Queensland. The recruitment process is nearing completion. It will not be long before the extra 20 staff will start work to ramp up fisheries compliance throughout the state. They will focus on compliance by recreational and commercial fishermen, gather intelligence to support prosecutions of offenders and educate the community about responsible and sustainable fishing. People in my electorate of Gladstone have one of the highest percentages of boat ownership in Queensland. They are passionate about their fishing and there is a sizable commercial fleet operating right out of the Gladstone Harbour. There have been no QBFP officers based in Gladstone since the local office was shut under the LNP. This is something that I raised with the fishing minister and I am delighted to say that not only did he and the previous minister listen, but they have delivered in spades for Gladstone. The Gladstone office will be reopened in a matter of weeks with four permanent officers based right in my city of Gladstone. The new offices in Gladstone will mean that the officers currently based in Yeppoon and Bundaberg will be able to spend more time in their own areas.