




Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

Record of Proceedings, 8 August 2017

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

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (8.03 pm): I rise to contribute to the estimates debate on the Agriculture and Environment Committee's report. I also thank all the committee staff for the hard work that they do. The Labor government's third budget for Agriculture is a document with no long-term vision for one of the state's most important industries. Agriculture is the state's wealth creator. It has been the unsung economic hero in the state. With the mining downturn, agriculture has been there for Queensland. It is not only putting food on our table and fibre on our back; it is also generating massive export dollars for Queensland. Under Labor, agriculture is not even a priority. Labor is more interested in the \$5 billion Cross River Rail project which we do not need. Could honourable members imagine if we spent some of that money in Agriculture?

The agriculture minister claimed staff numbers in his department had been maintained when the budget papers clearly show they have not. I table these documents which detail the 2014 budget, the last budget of the LNP, and the latest budget from the Labor Party, which shows a significant decrease in staff numbers.

Tabled paper: Extract from 2017-18 Queensland State Budget—Service Delivery Statements—Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, page 17 and extract from 2014-15 Queensland State Budget—Service Delivery Statements—Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, page 7 [[1249](#)].

The minister made a boastful opening statement claiming Labor had not cut funding for the department of agriculture and the staff numbers had been fully maintained. However, the budget papers for 2014-15 prove otherwise, clearly showing staff numbers at his department had fallen by 79 full-time equivalents. Either the minister is correct or his own budget papers were wrong. He cannot have it both ways. During the estimates hearing we tried to get a straight answer out of the minister, but none was forthcoming. Initially he refused to answer. Then he rambled about flexible numbers. He cannot have it both ways. His own budget papers prove staff numbers at the department of agriculture are lower than they were under the last year of the LNP government. Surely he would have seen this. Surely he would have checked this. Compared with the last LNP budget there were 69 fewer FTEs in Agriculture and 37 fewer FTEs in Biosecurity Queensland but overall it came out that there were 79 fewer FTEs from the last budget. Either the minister's budget papers are wrong—how does he explain?

Mr Byrne: I have explained it to you twice.

Mr MILLAR: Here is the thing, Minister. The Labor Party has claimed 15,000 extra Public Service staff have been put on since Labor came in, but no staff—not one staff member—has been put to the department of agriculture. Not one staff member has been put to the department of agriculture. The minister has been gloating about putting staff on, but not one staff member has been put to the department of agriculture. Likewise, funding for the department is well down and again the minister is in denial. Not one staff member has been put to the department of agriculture.

Ms Donaldson interjected.

Mr MILLAR: The member for Bundaberg was previously the minister for agriculture. Did you employ a staff member? Did you ask Jackie Trad, the Deputy Premier, 'Where is my staff? Where is the extra staff?' Did you ask? No.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Linard): Order! Member for Gregory. Please direct your comments through the chair.

Mr MILLAR: It is hardly any wonder that key stakeholders—groups such as AgForce and the Queensland Farmers' Federation—have labelled this budget 'underwhelming' and 'lacks any vision'.

I turn now to the environment minister. The environment minister, Steven Miles, confirmed he has no plans to deal with the looming environmental disaster of prickly acacia invading Queensland's iconic Channel Country and the Lake Eyre Basin. I asked the minister what he and his department were doing to protect the environment of the Channel Country and the vast flood plains of the Thomson, Barcoo and Diamantina rivers. The Minister for Environment said he had no plans. Yes, I do acknowledge that the minister does recognise prickly acacia is a problem, but the Minister for Environment has no plans. It was very disappointing to hear his reply that this massive environmental issue is not on his radar. The minister loves nothing better than to lecture us about the Great Barrier Reef, climate change and crocodiles. However, when it comes to plans for protecting some of the cleanest and best cattle-fattening country in the world, he is not interested. It is some other department's issue; it is for some other department and is nothing to do with Minister Miles. Minister Miles might like to have a great photo opportunity with reefs, turtles, koalas and crocodiles, but the environmental health of the Channel Country is absolutely critical to Western Queensland, our beef industry and the Lake Eyre Basin beyond. The beef industry in the Channel Country is just as important as the Great Barrier Reef. It is iconic and it needs to be protected. The Minister for Environment needs to make sure he protects it.