




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

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MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Palaszczuk Labor Government, Performance

 **Mr NICHOLLS** (Clayfield—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.32 am): Over the last few days I have spent time, alongside our hardworking member for Gregory, Lachlan Millar—who recently widely travelled and was re-endorsed out there; congratulations to him—visiting some of the most productive parts of our state in and around Emerald in Central Queensland and then west to Longreach. I have to say to the member for Stafford: mate, they ain't buying whatever you are selling! They are not buying it. You could not give it away out there, even if it came with some free surgery.

Regional and rural Queensland is in the LNP's DNA and we are determined to listen and implement policies that will build a better Queensland. On Friday the LNP's entire shadow cabinet held a community shadow cabinet meeting in Emerald offering an opportunity for locals to tell us all the action they would like to see occur in their community. We spoke with locals about the failures of the Palaszczuk Labor government of which there were many and the need to provide infrastructure and services for the Central Highlands and Coalfields region, a region that is so productive.

We know people in regional Queensland are hurting. We know that they want better business opportunities and jobs for our young people and we know that they are not getting that from a do-nothing Labor government that is presiding over a youth unemployment rate of above 40 per cent in outback Queensland—and we have seen the impacts of that total inaction in the past 24 hours! Labor's inability to make a decision after two long years in government and this Premier's inability to control her own cabinet have led to Adani putting off indefinitely a financial decision on the Carmichael mining project in Central Queensland. People in Emerald know the impact of not having that project go ahead. They know what it means for jobs. Whether it is the local tyre supplier, the local restaurants and businesses, the local workshops or the schools, they understand the value of this project going ahead. They want it to go ahead and they want it to go ahead quickly.

Labor's bitter internal divisions over the Adani project have thrown the future of that mine and its thousands of jobs into serious jeopardy. Despite all of the protests today and all of their rhetoric, it all rings hollow. It took almost two hours from the beginning of today's sitting of parliament for the Premier to even mention the word 'Adani' in this place. She has run, she has hidden, she has ducked and she has weaved. She has avoided at every opportunity answering questions that the people of Queensland deserve to have answers to. She has avoided telling the people of Queensland what her plan is because there is not one. After two years of bungling, two years of ineptness, two years of doing nothing, Adani have been left at the altar wondering what it is they have spent all of that time and money on.

The LNP understands the importance of these critical projects. We heard a little earlier the member for Ashgrove crowing about standing up for Queensland. When will the member for Ashgrove stand up for Queensland jobs in the regional parts of our state? When will she stand up for Queensland jobs against the left wing of the cabinet that wants to see this project die and not get out of the starting

blocks? When will she stand up and support the kids who will be educated at the Emerald Christian College or St Pat's or St Brigid's in Emerald? When will she stand up for the kids at the Emerald State High School who want to get an education, who want to live in their communities and who want their parents to have jobs as a result of the Adani mine?

It is easy for the member for Ashgrove to come in here and spend everyone else's money, take the funds from the federal government and make a political point of it but she fails to actually make the tough decisions that will see this project go ahead. The member for Ashgrove is pretty quick to claim credit for everything and pretty quick to run away when it comes to taking responsibility for anything.

We were also visited by the Prime Minister, who took time to visit Emerald for a community barbecue hosted by the local federal MP, Ken O'Dowd. He was warmly welcomed by the townspeople, local students and locals from across the district. He remarked on the enterprising nature of Central Queenslanders he had met who, like so many regional Australians, work hard every day to make their own success and who rarely seek government help to get there—the spirit that forged Queensland.

I want to acknowledge and thank the Central Highlands Mayor, Councillor Kerry Hayes, and his team for hosting a tour of some of the district's most progressive agricultural operations and who exemplified the Queensland spirit when he said, 'We are not looking for a handout. We are prepared to do the hard work ourselves. We just need someone to give us the assistance on occasions that regional and rural Queensland needs because of our distance, because of the vast areas that we cover.' He was only looking for a government that supports rather than opposes.

While, sadly, over 70 per cent of our state remains drought declared, I am pleased to report the pioneering spirit of our rural producers has not been broken. I saw many examples of agricultural businesses thriving through their investment in technology. We saw in Fairbairn Dam a clear example of how building a water storage facility and creating a reliable water supply can transform an agricultural area, bringing jobs and businesses and opportunities not just to the agricultural industry but to all of its related industries and, of course, to the mining sector.

The construction of the 1.3 million megalitre Fairbairn Dam in 1968 which was completed in 1972 was obviously a game changer for the Central Highlands and coalfields region. Filling and overflowing just two years later, Fairbairn has supported a massive expansion in cotton production and horticulture, including citrus, table grapes and melon crops, as well as irrigated winter crops like grain and chickpeas. There are even figs now being planted out there. Even at Fairbairn's current 45 per cent capacity, irrigators are currently drawing 100 per cent of their water entitlements from that dam.

On our trip last Thursday we saw a small percentage of the more than 50,000 hectares of agricultural land under irrigation. We visited the massive 2PH citrus and packaging operation owned by Craig Pressler. Those of us who were there saw millions of dollars of investment exporting up to 200 tonnes per week of citrus product to the world. We saw the Hinkler Park macadamia plantation—the world's largest macadamia producer managed by Ian Walter. We saw seedless watermelon grower and President of the Australian Melon Association, Mark Daunt. We also visited Alkira Vineyards where John Staier grows table grapes, figs—as I mentioned—and lemons for the domestic and export market. We saw hard evidence of how Emerald's vibrant farming sector filters into business opportunities right through service industries in town. It affects all of those businesses from fuel suppliers to machinery dealers to clothing shops and cafes. They all benefit from a healthy agriculture and mining sector. I might say they also benefited from a visit by the LNP cabinet which took heart and supported local industry.

Congratulations should go to Mayor Kerry Hayes for the strong role his local government is playing to drive economic growth across the Central Highlands. What I saw in Emerald reinforced why the LNP team will continue to push this do-nothing Labor government to get off its backside and work with the Turnbull coalition government to access the billions of dollars on the table to build the roads, bridges and dams Queensland needs. That money is there. It is waiting to be spent. It is only the failure of this Labor government to do the work that means it is not happening. This Labor government which cries poor, which always goes cap in hand like beggars to the table asking for the crumbs, cannot deliver.

It was the LNP government that made projects like the Toowoomba Second Range Crossing happen; that invested in the Toowoomba ring-road; and that put money into the Cooroy to Curra upgrade program. It was the LNP government which put the money on the table for exit 54 on the Gold Coast. It is this cheap, point-scoring jackal of a minister who feeds on the carcass of everyone else—who cannot go out and hunt it down himself but who has to sniffle around like some measly creature deleting emails and claiming he is poor—who rides on the coat-tails of those who can deliver.

We then travelled out to Longreach where, sadly, conditions are not as good, where people are doing it tough and there has not been good rain in four or five years. The hope is for winter rain again as there was last year and the proper summer rains to come so that reinvestment can go through. The Queensland spirit remains dauntless out there. The frontier spirit, where it is you who backs yourself and not the government that makes the decision, stands strong in Longreach.

(Time expired)