




Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

**State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development
Committee, Report**

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (12.55 pm): I rise to speak to the report on the estimates hearing for the State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee. Those opposite can sugar-coat this all they like, but what we saw during the hearings into this particular portfolio was nothing short of farcical. The minister's lengthy and rambling responses throughout the estimates hearing, combined with constant interjections by government members on the committee, severely restricted the ability of LNP members to ask relevant and probing questions regarding this portfolio.

The fact that I only got to ask 10 questions in two hours says it all and it makes an absolute mockery of the whole budget estimates process. Budget estimates is a process that aids parliament in its scrutiny of the government's proposed expenditure. It is an opportunity to examine proposed expenditures contained in the Appropriation Bill. Unfortunately, what we saw during the budget estimates for the portfolio of Natural Resources and Mines was nothing short of disgraceful. Do not just take my word for it: the media coverage was also scathing of the abuse of the process as outlined by my colleague the member for Condamine.

The portfolio of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy is a massive portfolio deserving of more than two hours scrutiny and examination. It is a portfolio that included topical topics such as: the black lung report and recommendations; the Gas Action Plan; the Aurizon dispute; Linc Energy; the Carmichael mine; vegetation management and the drought; irrigation costs and obsolete tariffs; water prices in South-East Queensland and regional areas; how we use our water assets; dam safety costs; the stock route network; water for mine development and operations; the Coal Seam Gas Compliance Unit; and business development opportunities. Wouldn't it have been nice to be able to delve into some of those issues and get a response from the minister?

What we saw was the minister's attempts to trivialise the impact that Labor's unfair antifarmer vegetation management laws are having on Queensland farmers, and that is nothing but a slap in the face for all of those hardworking farmers out there, particularly in our drought-affected areas who are doing it so tough at the moment. The minister's responses demonstrated a lack of understanding around this issue, and it was especially disappointing to have legitimate questions around the extra allocation of extension officers to support landholders continually rejected under the guise that the issue was not relevant and contrary to advice received by the minister's department.

It is clear that our farmers are struggling to understand and apply the new legislation to their farming practices. What is unclear is whether the minister has any intention of providing additional extension officers, particularly in rural areas, to assist farmers in understanding and applying these new vegetation management laws. Threats of enforcement action and widespread confusion across the

industry around the new laws have not been alleviated by a government propaganda campaign. The minister's insistence that farmers have nothing to worry about is causing widespread concern throughout Queensland.

On the topic of water, it was disappointing that the minister refused to rule out price hikes above the consumer price index for regional bulk water prices after the Labor government committed to increasing the price of water in the south-east three to five times higher than inflation over the next three years. This was a major blow for regional Queenslanders and particularly for our irrigators. Water is the lifeblood of our rural and regional communities, especially for agricultural industries, and it was disappointing that questions aimed at eliciting information around water price increases were deflected or went unanswered.

The unresolved issues around the viability of regional energy tariffs for small business through the transition of obsolete tariffs—T20, 21, 22, 37, 62, 65 and 66—after 1 July 2020 were brought to the minister's attention by highlighting that the government was still operating 761 taxpayer funded energy accounts, including more than 40 per cent of SunWater's water scheme operations. This revelation was particularly concerning. There is no question that significant issues exist with the business tariff offering post 1 July 2020 regarding this government's inability to deliver affordable and reliable sources of energy which will have a major impact on irrigation costs.

Queenslanders were promised a Gas Action Plan in 2015, yet here we are in 2018 and we still do not have it. Despite the minister saying that the plan was imminent, the minister in his response laid the blame at the foot of the federal government, and that was simply not good enough. To say that I was disappointed would be an understatement.

(Time expired)