



Speech By  
**Hon. Mark Furner**


**MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE**

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Record of Proceedings, 4 September 2018

**VEGETATION MANAGEMENT (CLEARING CODES) AND OTHER LEGISLATION  
AMENDMENT REGULATION**

**Disallowance of Statutory Instrument**

 **Hon. ML FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries) (6.17 pm): I rise to oppose and condemn the Liberal National Party for this disallowance motion. This is the party that is disingenuous with primary producers and flat out unable to prosecute its arguments without recourse to slogans and fact-free arguments.

The very fact of the matter is the Labor Party delivered on its election commitments. We delivered on what we said in 2015 and we delivered on what we said in 2017. On both occasions there was proper parliamentary process. On both occasions there was an avenue for stakeholders to have their say, and I want to acknowledge—and there is no surprise here—that AgForce and several other primary producers disagreed with these laws and regulations. That is their right. They have the right to do that as an organisation representing people on the land. The LNP is playing politics with this issue. It is demonising farmers by bringing this disallowance motion into this House—demonising farmers.

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Stewart): Order! Members, I am flat out listening to the minister despite his loud voice. I need you to show a bit of respect back to the speaker. I know that it can be provocative. I am happy to give a bit of leniency in that regard, but that was starting to get a little out of control.

**Mr FURNER:** How many times does this same argument need to be revisited? One of the criticisms that has been raised is that there has not been certainty in the past. Let the LNP provide that certainty now. It should end this disallowance motion and support the status quo. Then there will be certainty.

As the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries, I have travelled more than 35,000 kilometres and visited over 40 towns and cities in our wonderful state. I have listened to graziers, horticultural workers, processors, transporters and townspeople. The parliamentary committee travelled across Queensland. Everyone was able to have their say. The committee engaged with people in the regions. I would like to extend my thanks to the committee, which is led ably by the member for Bancroft and includes the members for Ipswich West and Mount Ommaney, for their tireless work over the past several months.

As minister, one concern I have is the misinformation from the LNP members. They have said that producers can no longer push mulga. We have heard that today, we have heard it here this evening and we have heard it on social media. That is blatantly incorrect and the members opposite know that. There are claims that people can push mulga, but it will cost thousands of dollars. That is incorrect as

well. Everyone from the federal agriculture minister down has peddled these untruths. It is causing confusion and angst in the communities that those members opposite say they represent. Just today, in a video posted on social media, the Leader of the Opposition, along with the members for Burdekin and Gympie, again maintained the line that farmers cannot push mulga. I say to them: stop using these hardworking people as political pawns. It is really disgusting.

Just nine days ago—on a Sunday—I travelled out to Charleville and visited Ged East of Maxvale. I think he is a fourth- or fifth-generation farmer. He was pushing mulga to feed his cattle. Along with that, he had bales of hay—it was not top-grade hay—from Mundubbera. Certainly, he had a supply of feed for his cattle. He told me that, without the ability to push mulga and given the current drought situation, he would have struggled to keep his stock. Imagine if people out there had been listening to the member for Burdekin when he tells them that they cannot push mulga. That would have put animals, businesses and lives at risk. The members opposite should really be ashamed of themselves when they come into this chamber and peddle these myths. I understand that the correct information has been provided to the producers.

For the benefit of the House, I will now refer to the facts. As we have heard today from other speakers, the new fodder code places a limit on the area that can be harvested under one notification. Landholders can make as many notifications as required. Before they make a second or subsequent notification, they must undertake a self-audit to ensure that their harvesting complies with the code. The new code also reduces the width of the strips that can be harvested at one time, but that ensures that the vegetation remains remnant and will regenerate, which ensures that fodder harvesting is sustainable in the long haul. That is what we need in mulga country.

Again and again, the LNP members have been caught out. They claim that these vegetation management laws worsen the drought for producers in Queensland. Let me talk about how the LNP deals with drought policy. More than 50 per cent of the state is drought declared. There are producers who have applied for and are being granted individual drought property declarations where their shire is not drought declared. Once again, the LNP members continue to play politics on drought without having any policy.

At a state level, the contributions of the shadow minister for agriculture demonstrate his lack of knowledge of procedure and promote political interference in the drought declaration process. Rather than seek expert advice on how the process works, the member pens petty political letters that demonstrate his inability to understand the process. I remind the member that he is free to seek a briefing to get the truth on the matter before meddling in the process. That shows that the LNP members value politics over people.

Any sort of policy on drought would have been desirable from the LNP conspirators in Canberra. Since 2013, when the coalition came to government, we have seen no drought reform. We have seen no acknowledgement of climate change. We have seen more Prime Ministers than drought plans. The architect of the LNP's disastrous agriculture policy—the border-crossing, loyalty-lacking Barnaby Joyce—has been rewarded by being made a drought envoy.

Just yesterday I met with Major General Stephen Day, who is the national drought coordinator. He is a wonderful man and he is also a member of my electorate. I am yet to hear from special envoy—whatever that means—Barnaby Joyce. It has been reported that Fiona Simpson, the President of the National Farmers' Federation, said that her organisation was still getting its head around what exactly Barnaby is doing. Having met David Littleproud earlier this year at the agriculture ministers meeting, I feel sympathy for him. To make matters worse, along with the new drought coordinator, Major General Stephen Day, and everyone else in the region of Queensland, David Littleproud is lumped with Barnaby. Barnaby had ample opportunity to consider the way forward for drought, and he failed miserably.

Queensland will work with Minister Littleproud on the drought situation as required, but Barnaby's envoy position is as toothless as is his competency. His appointment is almost as laughable as Tony Abbott being appointed the special envoy to Indigenous affairs. The systematic failure of Barnaby is as simple as one, two, three. Three letters were sent to Barnaby about a top-up to the emergency water infrastructure rebate, and all three requests were knocked back. In May, I wrote to Minister Littleproud about this matter. I look forward to his consideration when he responds. Producers need the support of measures to assist them in this drought and the next. The emergency water infrastructure rebate does that. It is time Canberra came on board.

I remind the House of the following comments of the Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy—

I thank the members for their contribution, including the heartfelt contribution we just heard, but I would just like to reiterate that it is still a self-assessable code. Mulga can be harvested for fodder under a notification. Not much has changed.

It seems that the LNP will prosecute an argument that need not be prosecuted. There is no argument. Let us work together to promote, not talk down, agriculture in Queensland. At times like these, our farmers need our assistance. As a parliament, we are assisting farmers through this time of drought through the Queensland Drought Appeal. To date, as we heard from the Premier, we have raised \$2.5 million. I want to see that amount grow so that it can benefit more farmers to get through this drought. There will be an end to this drought. We will see rain.

I have met many farmers in my travels. It has been such a privilege. I will never forget the words of a canefarmer up in Proserpine in May this year. He said, 'I'm a conservationist. I've cleared the amount of land I want to work on to grow cane. I don't need to clear any more. I'm protecting the land by keeping those trees on the waterways.' This evening, there was a comment about paperwork. I encourage those opposite to get on to their LNP members in Canberra, because the farm household insurance application is 102 questions long and 14 pages in length. That is not assisting our graziers in getting assistance on the ground when it is needed.