




Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

Record of Proceedings, 18 June 2020

PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT

Whitsundays, Tourism Industry

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (2.25 pm): The tourism industry in the Whitsundays has been decimated by COVID-19. We have learned today that over 174,000 Queenslanders have lost their jobs in the past three months, and the Whitsundays have been hit harder than most. No tourists mean no business for a lot of the locals. Whitsundays tourism operators have received scant support from those opposite, and that is a disgrace. The Labor government has given two rounds of taxpayer funded assistance to tourism operators in Cairns. The Whitsundays region is just as reliant on tourism as Cairns and the Gold Coast. It begs the question: why has it been treated like a second-class tourism destination?

When you look at the businesses in Cairns that have received taxpayer funded assistance from those opposite, one in particular stands out—Quicksilver Connections Ltd. Quicksilver is a business the Labor member for Cairns knows very well. The member for Cairns worked for Quicksilver for more than 15 years. He was the Group Director of Sales and Marketing. Queensland taxpayers have been sold a lemon with this funding deal. Quicksilver is owned by Shinichiro Watari, who lives in Hong Kong. He is a Japanese billionaire with varied investments. He owns Quicksilver through his investment firm Cornes & Co.

Queensland taxpayers' money should be supporting Queensland businesses, not foreign billionaires. It is plainly wrong. Foreign owned firms in Cairns are getting taxpayer support while businesses in the Whitsundays have been abandoned—businesses like Coral Sea Marina and the charter boat operators who source up to 90 per cent of their income from international tourists. When it comes to this government it really is a case of, 'Charter boat? What charter boat?' Businesses are closing and jobs are being lost in the Whitsundays right now. The main street of Airlie Beach looks like a ghost town.

It was a bitter pill to swallow for the Whitsundays when they found out that those opposite are propping up a business owned by a billionaire the member for Cairns used to work for. It stinks to high heaven and it is no wonder businesses in the Whitsundays are blowing up. The Palaszczuk Labor government needs to explain why it has helped this business but is refusing to help the Whitsundays.

Politics should play no part in determining where relief funding ends up. Businesses in the Whitsundays deserve a level playing field. They pay the same taxes as businesses in Cairns and should get the same support. The Palaszczuk Labor government has failed to grasp just how important these tourism jobs are to the Whitsundays. The LNP will stand up for every single job in Queensland, whether it is in Cairns or Airlie Beach.