




Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

Record of Proceedings, 2 December 2020

MOTION

Agriculture Industry

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (5.49 pm): I rise to speak in support of the motion moved by the member for Gympie. As a newly elected MP in 2015 in the 55th Parliament, I worked hard to bring to the notice of the House the devastating effects of the drought which had seized Western Queensland in a fierce grip and was then creeping across Queensland west to east. The drought still has Western Queensland in a death grip. I cannot speak highly enough of the fortitude shown by my constituents in facing the situation. For some, it has been nearly eight or nine years. We have seen essential small businesses close, bringing an associated loss of population and a loss of skills. This is crippling us and undermining the livability of vast swathes of Queensland.

As this parliament's largest electorate, Gregory is the beating heart of Queensland. It contains all of the central land mass, from one hour out of Rockhampton to the Simpson Desert and to the borders of South Australia and the Northern Territory. The recent reports of suicide showed that the Central Highlands and Outback Queensland, both in my electorate of Gregory, were in the top five hotspots for suicide nationally. This tragic record has everything to do with drought, despair and a sense that we are being ignored, but it is more than the sense of the suffering being ignored. It is the sense of having our interests being actively attacked by the Labor government. The attacks have included reef regulations that impinge on farming as far inland as west of Emerald with no proven scientific benefit for the reef, and it is more red tape.

The Labor government's mishmash of red and green tape has directly contributed to two terrible fire seasons because farmers cannot manage fuel loads on their own lands and the government will not manage them in national parks, yet the Labor government flatly refuses to review the impacts of its own badly designed legislation on bushfire risks.

The vegetation management laws and the threatened species trigger maps mean that agriculture has lost its property rights and is so strangled by green tape that it is not allowed to manage its businesses and landscapes without the approval of bureaucrats in Brisbane. At the same time, its ability to receive advice from the same bureaucrats has been seriously impacted. Under the cloak of COVID safety, DAF employees were told not to speak directly to farmers who came into their offices seeking help. These public servants live in and wonderfully serve our communities. They are a part of our community and a part of Western Queensland. They protested that this order was causing damage to the department's reputation because customers could physically see that they were in offices but refusing to talk directly in person. What was the response? They were instructed to hide. Yes, they were instructed to hide rather than offer assistance.

It is my understanding that, despite Western Queensland never having community transmission of coronavirus, the instruction to hide is still standing. Now we see staff cuts in the same department, this most vital of all departments—Agriculture. Some \$44 million has been reamed out of the budget, no doubt to be spent on an unrelated thing in the south-east corner. Labor cuts to drought freight and

fodder subsidies must be taken off the table. They are short-sighted and will impact the recovery of our state's herd and flocks post drought. More than that, they are heartless in a time of such despair. I am speaking about something close to my heart.

I have an eye on the clock, but I must speak on the disgraceful closure of the Longreach Pastoral College and the Emerald Agricultural College. This was done years ago now, and \$10 million has been spent conducting community consultation on what to do with the empty campuses. Meanwhile, our sons and daughters have lost access to key training in agriculture in our region. The decision to close these campuses was vicious. Their communities are desperate to see the facilities kept intact and used for agriculture or even trades training. Make no mistake: these were jewels in the Queensland training crown and those assets, once dispersed, will never be able to be put back together again. This budget sprinkles millions on TAFE agricultural colleges in Toowoomba, Bowen and Bundaberg—and I welcome that—while our gates in Longreach and in Emerald remain locked. Our communities, which have lost so much, now lose their young people, too.

Finally, we were hoping that in this budget we would see the minister commit to the \$5 million he promised for prickly acacia with the federal minister, but we do not see that. Prickly acacia is on our doorstep in the Channel Country. That is our 'Great Barrier Reef'. Minister, put that \$5 million into prickly acacia funding now.