




Speech By
Hon. Mark Furner

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

Record of Proceedings, 5 February 2020

MOTION

Coronavirus

 **Hon. ML FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries) (11.55 am): I rise to support this motion. The impacts of the coronavirus are already being felt by the Queensland fisheries and agricultural sector which is exposed to this global health emergency. Queensland's agricultural and fisheries sector is an outwards facing and trade reliant sector that employs more than 400,000 Queenslanders in first and second stage processing. Agriculture's forecast worth for 2019-20 was to be \$17.8 billion, with drought already impacting Queensland. This new threat is no doubt unwelcome.

China, which is now impacted by coronavirus, is a close and longstanding trading partner. Our trade with China was worth \$1.53 billion in 2018-19, and China is a significant and growing export market for Queensland beef. I can speak firsthand on that. I visited Chongqing in China last year. They have an insatiable appetite for our clean, green produce. It is an important sector to look after and nourish. Other key exports to China include mandarins, edible nuts, beans, fish, crustaceans, hides and skins, sorghum and untreated wood.

Last night I was honoured to attend the Australia China Business Council dinner, along with the Premier and Mr Hinchliffe. I thank them for their positivity in such a difficult time. The fact is that China is Queensland's largest two-way trading partner and a major investor in our state. The rising incomes and increasing consumer demand across China have supported export opportunities for Queensland's food and fibre producers, backed by the 2015 China-Australia free trade agreement.

China's rapidly growing middle-class consumers are interested in fresh, high-quality fruit and vegetables, meat, sugar and other animal products which Queensland produces to world-class standards. It is a great reputation we have. I am proud as the agriculture minister to support that not only in this state but also nationally and globally.

Last night at the Australia China Business Council dinner there was a guest speaker who noted the close relationship between Australia and China. We stand with Chinese people during this difficult time. I am sure that many members will be in attendance at the parliamentary 2020 Lunar New Year celebration this evening on the Speaker's Green. China stood by us during the GFC and now it is our turn to stand with them. At this time of year with the Chinese Lunar New Year celebrations, there is a strong demand for our seafood—a demand that has been impacted by the coronavirus. This has directly impacted our fishers already. I note the calls from Eric Perez from the Queensland Seafood Industry Association, whom my office has been in contact with directly. He said—

Newstart payments for example, you could get that to people very quickly to help them and hopefully not have all the bureaucratic red tape that goes with applying cos we need this assistance quite quickly and Government has the capacity to do that.

That is a position that this federal government can take and act on right now. Our agriculture and fisheries sector has been impacted by multiple natural disasters and drought over the past few years. In the fisheries sector, as a result of this coronavirus, we know internationally they will be impacted directly by coral trout and rock lobster sales. We know locally and domestically they are impacted already by mud crab sales. It is a direct impact right across this nation, right across our state.

Approximately 12 months ago the monsoonal event hit north-west of Townsville, and I must give credit to the Prime Minister. At that time he intervened and joined Queensland's response and worked with all levels of government to spontaneously deliver that funding. Now is not the time for the federal government to turn their back on Queensland and the Chinese community. The recent bushfires and now this virus have compounded the impacts on our agriculture and fisheries sector.

This is a global health emergency. We need the federal government to act; industry wants the federal government to act. The Prime Minister needs to declare this under disaster recovery arrangements. It makes perfect sense. What I am calling for is what industry wants: immediate action.

I also call on those opposite to pick up the phone and use their opportunity to engage with those federal parliamentarians. I know they have been squabbling due to their leadership challenges, but now is not the time for that.

(Time expired)