




Speech By  
**Hon. Mark Furner**

**MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE**

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### **APPROPRIATION (COVID-19) BILL**

 **Hon. ML FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries) (5.26 pm): I rise to support the Appropriation (COVID-19) Bill that is being debated in the House this afternoon. The bill enables a comprehensive range of supports for Queensland during the COVID-19 public health emergency. These are unprecedented times and we have a Queensland government that is willing to enact unprecedented measures and facilitate unprecedented cooperation with the Commonwealth to get the best possible outcome for Queenslanders.

Queensland moved faster than any other state to declare a health emergency. We moved quickly to provide initial assistance to the first impacted industries and then we acted decisively with the most significant and comprehensive jobs, business and health support package seen anywhere in the nation. The Queensland government's support for jobs, for business and for public health has led the nation. The passage of the legislation before the House this evening will ensure that that support can continue to save jobs and promote the state's recovery. Importantly for business and for employees, the Palaszczuk government has outlined a \$2.5 billion suite of measures, including payroll tax relief, a worker displacement program to connect unemployed workers with areas of labour demand, electricity bill rebates for small and medium sized businesses, liquor licence fee waivers, tourism industry support and specific support for our fishing industry.

Initial support in the agriculture and fisheries sector included market diversification and resilience loans designed to help directly impacted exporters and their supply chain businesses to source new markets or adapt their processes to keep their workforces employed and to keep business revenue flowing while things settle down. We are still working with industry every week to determine where roadblocks might be and how we can assist, so that this vital industry keeps employing Queenslanders and keeps our food and fibre supplies moving at the high standard that Queenslanders and their customers right around the globe have come to expect. We have put in funding to support local government, industry and business with recovery strategies, targeted financial support and counselling, and provided \$400 million in land tax relief for property owners.

A critically important facility helping Queensland businesses to not only survive but also maintain their workforce is the \$500 million COVID-19 job support loan package offering low-interest loans up to \$250,000 to assist with carry-on expenses such as employee wages, rent and rates and other related expenditure. The Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority manages the application and processing of these loans which will be a vital bridge to assist Queensland businesses.

Due to strong demand, QRIDA has now closed the scheme to new applicants. I am pleased to inform the House that as of yesterday QRIDA had approved 1,390 applications worth \$206.4 million, much of which is already deposited into the bank accounts of those Queensland businesses. That is \$206.4 million that is helping Queensland businesses to survive and improve and importantly supporting 18,785 Queensland jobs. These loans are interest-free for the first 12 months. The Palaszczuk government is supporting Queensland businesses and their workers during this trying time. We have Queenslanders' backs.

I have to take a moment to thank the incredible staff at QRIDA who have been moving mountains to put this scheme into action quickly, effectively and efficiently. There has never been a greater need for swift action to support Queensland businesses and jobs. QRIDA and its people have made it possible. There has been more than \$200 million in targeted business loans already approved, with the remaining funds up to \$500 million being processed as we speak.

I want to table some documents and reference some of the good stories before I proceed. In Charters Towers, a fourth-generation family that supports 32 local jobs has been successful through those loans to continue to support that amount of people locally. A Goondiwindi civil engineering company has been able to continue their support of 40 regional workers through the COVID-19 Jobs Support Loans. Some 30 people are supported through Red Rooster through Michael Taylor's success in getting that loan approved. Closer to home, Clear Mountain Lodge has been able to provide immediate cash flow relief, allowing the business to refund cancelled bookings, pay suppliers and pay employees' entitlements. I table those for the benefit of the House.

*Tabled paper:* Bundle of Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority fact sheets relating to COVID-19 [634].

This a direct injection that not only will support those businesses and those jobs but also will be a vital stimulus to the state's economy over the coming months.

QRIDA and staff have been unsung champions in the response and I thank them for all their hard work in this respect. Last year QRIDA marked 25 years of serving Queensland. Over that time more than \$3.6 billion has been invested in the future of rural and regional Queensland. The latest loan package will bring the total support it has delivered to Queensland to more than \$4 billion.

Supporting the jobs of Queensland is not a new thing for the Palaszczuk government. Creating jobs has been at the heart of what this government does and what this government stands for. We know that our agriculture and agribusiness sectors have been the backbone of Queensland's economy and represent an essential economic pillar both before and during this extraordinary pandemic.

Queensland farmers and agribusinesses are resilient and innovative. They have shown that year after year. They are showing it now through rough times, even as many continue to deal with drought and its effect. It is pleasing to see that even during the COVID-19 crisis the sector is finding new ways to meet the demand for quality food and fresh produce.

Many people are rediscovering the joys of baking while they are working and isolating at home. Who does not love the smell and the taste of homemade bread straight from the oven? That is where Kialla Pure Foods at Greenmount has stepped up to meet a growing demand. Digressing slightly, I inform members that they were successful through the RED grants. Their business has improved by 300 per cent, allowing them to employ six more staff. It is a great success story that we are hearing out of difficult times at present. Among the workers they have put on are a musician and also a former mine worker. If it were not for the Palaszczuk government's RED grants, home-grown companies like this would not have been able to secure that equipment needed to supply hungry Queenslanders with quality organic flours, pancake mixes and other baking ingredients.

Creating and protecting Queensland jobs is in the Palaszczuk government's DNA. We will continue to fight for every Queensland worker and for all Queenslanders' jobs. That is what we stand for. Queenslanders are doing what they need to do to help flatten the curve to save Queenslanders' lives. We have their back when it comes to protecting Queensland jobs as well. We have been doing everything we can to protect Queenslanders' jobs and the economy to make sure that Queenslanders can bounce back quickly from this pandemic.

During the global financial crisis, I was proud to serve the federal parliament as a Labor senator for Queensland. We knew then that we needed to act fast. We needed to target assistance. We needed to make sure that we supported both businesses and employment. As a result, Australia was one of the few countries in the world that did not experience a recession and hundreds of thousands of Australian jobs were protected. Now, as proud members of the Palaszczuk Labor government in Queensland, we are once again doing what is necessary in unprecedented situations of global significance to support Queensland businesses and to protect Queensland jobs.

Along the path of engagement with stakeholders, I have had many unexpected complimentary comments from people such as Minister Littleproud, the federal agriculture minister, commending the Palaszczuk government for our actions during this difficult time. Just yesterday with me over the phone, an LNP senator from Tasmania, Senator Duniham, was commending the Palaszczuk government for what we have done during this COVID crisis. The Queensland Farmers' Federation, AgForce, Rachel Mackenzie from Berries Australia—these are all people recognising the good work that the Palaszczuk Labor government has done in these difficult times for not only Queensland jobs but also the Queensland economy. I commend this bill to the House and encourage people to support its passage.