




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Record of Proceedings, 2 December 2020

MOTION

Agriculture Industry

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (5.19 pm): I rise to support the original motion moved by the member for Gympie. It acknowledges the importance of Queensland's primary producers and allows me the opportunity to again highlight some of the many anti-farmer and anti-region policies which confront the many hardworking mum-and-dad businesses that produce food and fibre around the state and in the Burnett electorate.

It is relevant to remind the House of the debacle that occurred when the Paradise Dam was emptied and lowered by 5.8 metres in the middle of one of the worst droughts in history. The state was nearly 70 per cent drought-declared. The handling of the whole sorry saga is a disgrace. There have been cover-ups, deceit, spin and attacks on the region's prosperity as a sustainable food and fibre producer, as evidenced by the amount of investment that was placed on hold and lost opportunities for the planned expansion of farming enterprises. This really is a serious issue. The rhetoric that has been—and continues to be—rolled out is about community safety, but I still do not believe we have ever been given an explanation. Testing, which has been kept secret, continues. Mr Deputy Speaker, you work that out.

The agriculture industry deserves a better process with engineers, domestic and international, being engaged to determine exactly what is wrong with Paradise Dam and put things in place to fix the dam once and for all. The government's own commission of inquiry recommended that more testing be done. Locals had to raise funds to engage an international expert from the United States, who confirmed that the dam can be fixed for a lot less than the government is spending to tear it down. Our council and farmers like Judy, Tina, Bruce, Tom Marland, Craig, Jamie and Andrew all raised their own money to bring this international expert out. I also acknowledge Bundaberg fruit and veggie growers and the canegrowers industry for standing up to the government in the great fight which we lost.

Water security for the regions and Queensland is such an important issue. We must invest in water projects right across Queensland. We must reinstate Paradise Dam. We must build new dams. We should not mock the new Bradfield scheme. Urannah and Nullinga dams must progress as a matter of urgency. As we know, there has not been a dam built in 15 years in this state under Labor. The only thing they can take credit for now is tearing one down. It is important that the rhetoric used by the government with regard to yield and water ceases, and a real examination of what water security in this state looks like must be conducted so that everyone can understand the issues around government decision-making.

I am convinced that the government has no real plans for water security, as is evidenced in this week's budget. Issues with the seasonal worker program have to be acknowledged. There will be serious consequences in relation to the picking of fruit and veggies across this state. This issue has again become a political football. Can you believe this state government is picking a fight with the federal government about what it means to get seasonal workers, encouraging locals to take up the mantle and

pick this fruit. We conducted a great media stunt in Bundaberg. We offered people money to bring them to the region. It was a complete failure, but we have not heard anything in the budget about what they are going to do to try and get the fruit and veggies out of the paddock and into the markets. We must make sure that those families are supported more than they are now.

I also want to talk about the anti-farmer issues I raised with the minister in question time in relation to MSF Sugar and the folding up of that industry. We must continue to invest to ensure that these industries continue to be the lifeblood of their communities. The Maryborough canegrowers deserve an opportunity to continue to crush their cane and the Isis Canegrowers' Association is willing to do that, but we cannot have a government minister standing up and basically telling the industry to sort it out for themselves. This is a serious issue for the industry. If we want to talk about jobs and agriculture, this is a real litmus test for the government to stump up.

I also want to talk about the committee report concerning invasive weeds. It took years to be tabled, and at the end of that not one recommendation was ever forwarded and taken up by the government. It took a long time for primary producers to garner real hope and opportunity from the government to deal with invasive weeds right across the state in our road corridors and waterways. They are again being ignored by this government and let down. I also want to remind the House about the complete debacle in the fishing industry and what happened with the tragedy of commercial producers and vessel monitoring systems. We still need the government to step up and make sure that that system links with police and emergency services so those fishermen who go out to catch that fresh fruit—seafood and fruit—

An honourable member: Fruits of the sea.

Mr BENNETT: Fruits of the sea—have the opportunity to be supported by this government. They are anti regions and anti farmers. More importantly, those families in the fishing industry who lost so much still deserve an apology from the minister for not implementing the VMS when he had the opportunity. Now is the time for this government to step up, give primary producers real support, and let's make sure that the agricultural sector can be supported and proud of what they do to produce food and fibre.