




Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT

Western Queensland, Grasshoppers

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (2.49 pm): I rise to speak again on the issue of grasshopper swarms in the Longreach and Winton districts and the complete lack of support by the minister for agriculture, Mark Furner. It is a disgrace. His inaction is sending graziers in Western and Central Queensland, and also in Southern Queensland, to the wall. Only after the Leader of the Opposition had inspected the situation firsthand was I able to get Minister Furner to show any interest.

Today in the *Queensland Country Life* it is reported that he finally undertook an inspection for himself. Yesterday the minister said in the House that Winton was not a part of my electorate. His grasp of Queensland geography is distinctly unnerving so I give him marks for finding his way to Winton and getting out from Ferny Grove. He also belatedly secured approval for the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority to use Fenitrothion to try to contain the damage.

The damage is now covering over 1.5 million hectares. This is country that has suffered under drought for years and is still drought declared. Parts of the area were also devastated by freak monsoonal flooding at the beginning of 2019. This summer finally brought a promise that the drought may break. In the parts of the Winton and Longreach districts lucky enough to receive some summer rain, the resulting pasture growth is the first real hope for graziers for many years. We know that when the weather shifts like this grasshoppers are a predictable concern. The minister for agriculture should have had landholder working groups in place back in October last year, not now. A suitable chemical control should have already been approved last year and supplies should have been placed on the Longreach and Winton airports ready to go. It is the role of the minister to form and coordinate a response across the district.

During the last sitting of parliament, in response to a question in the House from me, the minister said the department of agriculture was conducting a survey. Minister, these grasshoppers are eating, not meeting! They are eating pastures now. Today's *Queensland Country Life* reveals that the Winton Shire Council has conducted a survey to calculate the damage bill. Mayor Gavin Baskett, who is a fantastic mayor for Winton, says the survey shows at least \$34 million worth of damage a year is being sustained by graziers. I will say that again: \$34 million worth of damage a year is being sustained by graziers because of these grasshoppers. However, Minister Furner has washed his hands of responsibility for containing this devastation and will not be providing any financial assistance to landholders using chemical controls.

Queensland graziers are outraged at Minister Furner's comments in the *Queensland Country Life* that 'it is not helpful to suggest this is a natural disaster. It builds up a false expectation.' Well, minister, the only false expectation we have is that you will do your job properly. You are not doing your job properly.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Kelly): Direct your comments through the chair, please.

Mr MILLAR: This minister likes to describe himself as 'Furner, the farmers' friend'. He should either step up or step out.