



Speech By
Hon. Mark Furner

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

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Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation Bill

Economics and Governance Committee, Report

 **Hon. ML FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities) (3.40 pm): I rise to speak on the report of the State Development and Regional Industries Committee. I would like to once again express my appreciation to the committee and in particular the chair, the member for Bancroft. The estimates process is an important one and no easy task to lead, so I congratulate him on his sterling efforts in this regard.

The story of agriculture in Queensland is one that often defies simple charts and tables of numbers in black and white. The report outlining how we have maintained staffing levels in the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries does not tell the story of how DAF officers became a lifeline for our farmers navigating the COVID-19 pandemic. The total annual budget investment figures, more than \$100 million over what the LNP delivered, do not tell the story of the investment in new crop varieties, the developments in animal welfare or the extraordinary efforts made to help our farmers access the labour they need.

The \$71.4 million invested in drought support programs does not tell you how that has proved to be the difference for Queensland farmers. The \$42.5 million invested in fisheries reforms does not outline the measures necessary to see jobs in our commercial and recreational fishing industries survive and thrive. The \$32.8 million towards improvements in land practices to protect the Great Barrier Reef does not tell the full story of this incredible natural and economic asset for Queenslanders. None of these figures tell the stories of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on our farmers, fishers and supply chains. It is a tribute to everyone in my department that they have maintained an excellent focus on both the current and future needs of the agriculture and fisheries industries while navigating a path through the new realities brought about by the pandemic.

I should also point out that I was at the Maroochy Research Station last week, and they were very pleased to hear that the committee confiscated a large tray of their new strawberry varieties at the hearing.

The Palaszczuk government remains heavily focussed on Queensland's COVID-19 economic recovery plan, and our commitment to creating jobs and driving down unemployment has seen Queensland lead the nation. We only need to look to our southern border to know that the threat of the pandemic to our agriculture sector remains real and immediate. That is why so many Queenslanders

continue to congratulate and thank our Premier and her team for keeping Queenslanders safe. Just this morning on ABC Radio David Foote from Australian Country Choice commended the Palaszczuk government on its achievements. My thanks go out to the wonderful people in my department who are helping the industry navigate these choppy waters.

These are the facts pointed to in the committee report, but it would be remiss of me not to mention the opposition's statement of reservations, where we drift more into the realms of fiction than fact. In fact, this section weaves such an elaborate fantasy that one wonders whether it is based on the estimates committee hearings at all or if the LNP wrote it beforehand. The opposition's complaint of not getting enough time for non-government questions once again entertains. I am advised that non-government MPs asked 71 per cent of questions across all estimates hearings this year. It seems they had more than enough chances to ask whatever they wanted.

Of course, the LNP's miserable failure to read the SDS means they were always going to start behind the eight ball. They looked at last year's one-off investments because of the COVID-19 pandemic, compared them to this year's budget, and claimed there were massive cuts to services and staff. You would think the LNP would know all about cuts to staff and funding after their record in government. I hate to tell the opposition this, but the reason you could not find those cuts is because there aren't any. The opposition complains AgTech was not mentioned as a budget highlight. Well, guess how many questions the opposition asked about AgTech in the estimates hearing? None!

The opposition continues with its fantasies of a dystopian future without them being in government while the farming sector is looking to the future and getting on with the job of growing the best produce in the world. As the farmers' friend, I should acknowledge that the opposition's statement of reservation did include one sentence that can sit in the non-fiction section and that is, 'The Opposition agrees with passing the budget.'