



Speech By  
**Hon. Mark Furner**


**MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE**

---

Record of Proceedings, 27 October 2022

## **MENTAL HEALTH SELECT COMMITTEE**

### **Report, Motion to Take Note**

 **Hon. ML FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities) (3.07 pm): Firstly, allow me to acknowledge the Consul-General for China in Queensland, Dr Ruan, who is in the public gallery today. It is great to see Dr Ruan here.

I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the report of the Mental Health Select Committee titled *Inquiry into the opportunities to improve mental health outcomes for Queenslanders*. I acknowledge the chair, the member for Greenslopes, in particular, but also acknowledge all other committee members who acted in the true spirit of bipartisanship of select committees. In my time in this parliament I have not had the opportunity to be on a select committee but certainly in my previous career in the Senate I did. This committee acted similarly if not exactly the same—in a true bipartisan way.

As all of us in this chamber know, the Palaszczuk government has committed \$1.6 billion in the recent budget for better mental health. That is a record investment in terms of addressing mental health. I wish to comment in respect of a couple of the recommendations. Firstly, recommendation No. 7 is about improving service provision to rural and regional Queensland and expanding those service models. I pay particular attention to some of the statistics in this regard. As stated in the report—

Suicide remains the leading cause of death for Australians aged 15 to 44 years, with regional communities reporting a 54% higher rate of suicide than capital cities. Suicide rates tend to increase with remoteness, with suicide rates in very remote regions reported to be almost twice that of the national average.

The report further states—

While the prevalence of mental illness is similar in urban and regional Australia, the outcomes are worse for people living in rural areas.

There may be many compelling reasons why this is the case. Queensland is the most diverse state in the nation, and remoteness as a result of our diverseness could be one of the very factors that demonstrates why this might be the case. Nevertheless, that is why the Palaszczuk government has invested \$1.6 billion in terms of mental health.

I have seen it quite often. We are the most natural disaster prone state in the nation. I believe there have been about 100 natural disasters in the last decade. We have had years of drought and now flooding, cyclones and fires. I am sure there are many regional members in this chamber who go out and engage with their constituents. The one event that stuck in my mind—and will always be in my mind—is the monsoonal event in 2019 affecting the Flinders Highway out from Hughenden to Cloncurry. You hear quite often about the resilience of farmers, but you wonder how far they can be tested after what they went through with that particular natural disaster. When you looked into the eyes of those farmers you could see the shock and stress, particularly around Julia Creek, where we were engaging with them to make sure they were getting provisions through QRIDA. The Australian government,

working hand in hand with the Queensland government, delivered up to \$75,000 to assist those farmers in recovering from that extreme event. As a state, we lost more than 500,000 from our cattle herd as a result of that natural disaster, but you wonder at times how long it takes for them to recover. With good governments like the Palaszczuk government assisting them, their recovery was possible.

In terms of other organisations, I have seen QFF engaging with an opportunity called Are you Bugged, Mate? Craig Zonka from the ABC and I launched that in Toowoomba several years ago. It offers assistance to farmers in regional centres who suffer from mental illness. Another example of where this government is assisting is through our drought preparedness model. We have brought in reforms to assist farmers to make sure they can claim drought preparedness assistance before they are in drought. A prime example of that was when the cabinet was in Stanthorpe. We went to McMahon Bros Orchards and saw the assistance the Palaszczuk government was providing with regard to five kilometres of polypipe to irrigate their orchards. These sorts of measures go a long way towards assisting people in rural communities who need that assistance most.

Once again I want to commend the committee members for this report. It is an excellent report. It demonstrates where we need to make changes with regard to mental health.