




Speech By
James Lister

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

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ADJOURNMENT

Fire Ants

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (7.12 pm): I rise tonight to speak about the scourge of fire ants. I note that my honourable friend the member for Gympie asked a question without notice this morning about fire ants. I would like the House to acknowledge and understand what a tremendous threat this is to our state. It is a threat that is currently besieging my honourable friend the member for Theodore in his electorate. It is throughout the Scenic Rim, which borders my electorate, and it is coming to Southern Downs.

This is a plague which has the potential to be far more damaging to our environment than cane toads, if we can consider that as a comparison. In terms of ecosystems and biodiversity damage, fire ants are a very serious threat indeed. That is quite apart from the obvious impacts on humans and our ability to enjoy the environment and, very importantly, to produce the food and fibre that we need to live. Agriculture and grazing is going to be severely affected in my electorate and beyond if the march of fire ants is not arrested.

I was very disappointed and shocked this morning to see that the Premier, although not directly administering the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, which has carriage in Queensland of the National Fire Ant Eradication Program, was unable to give even the most mildly insightful response to the question. It is clear that the leader of this state is entirely ignorant of the status of the fire ant threat, how the programs are funded and who is responsible for delivering them, and what the threats to our environment and economy are.

On top of this, the federal Labor government, in their most recent budget, cut the funding for the National Fire Ant Eradication Program. It is only \$60 million compared to the \$94 million that was spent in the previous financial year. We need to be ramping up rather than ramping down if we are going to arrest this scourge, which has already gone far too far. The state government does not bathe itself in glory in the way it has discharged the Fire Ant Eradication Program here in Queensland. It is getting way out of control. There have been too many missed opportunities and too much incompetence in dealing with it, and we are going to pay the price.

I would like to give a lesson to the Labor government. They like to talk about spending money—record billions on this and record billions on that—and how many people they are employing. That money has to come from somewhere. They do not get it from taxing politicians and public servants. The funds for those things come from a vibrant and strong economy, and that strong economy in my electorate is agriculture. It is about the food and the fibre that we need to feed ourselves, to export to the world and to pay our way. I urge the government to get on top of this. I urge the Premier to avail herself of what she needs to know to be a good Premier in the case of fire ants.

(Time expired)