



Speech By  
**Hon. Mark Furner**


**MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE**

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Record of Proceedings, 26 October 2023

**PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT**

**Fire Ants**

 **Hon. ML FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities) (2.21 pm): Fire ants are one of the most invasive species on the planet and they threaten communities and economies across the globe. If uncontrolled they could cost the Australian economy up to \$2 billion a year, which is why the National Fire Ant Eradication Program is so important. Had it not been for our efforts, these superpests would have marched north to Bowen, west to Longreach and south to Canberra.

Fighting this scourge was on the nation's radar at the weekend when I joined federal Treasurer Jim Chalmers and Minister for Agriculture Murray Watt to announce the Albanese government's additional investment of \$286 million in the fire ant program. The national eradication program is complemented by the Palaszczuk government's \$37.5 million Fire Ant Suppression Taskforce. We are investing in bait drones. We have a team of dogs that are trained to find ants quickly. We are investing in hundreds of new jobs. We are establishing a centre on the Gold Coast. We are throwing everything at this insidious insect because we need to protect our communities where we live, work and play.

This is a far cry from the thinking of those opposite who, true to form, slashed 26 per cent of our essential Biosecurity Queensland staff. Nationally the former LNP government cut 25 per cent of biosecurity staff. Forty-five Queensland fire ant workers lost their jobs and funding was halved under the LNP when they were last in government. There has been much publicity about the spread of fire ants on the Gold Coast. There has been a huge response from the community, which has taken up the offer of free fire ant treatments because they know the importance of combating this pest. Even Gold Coast mayor Tom Tate knows the importance of combatting this pest. He stated that he is delighted with this recent announcement in a letter to residents, which I table.

*Tabled paper:* Document, undated, titled 'Mayor's message' regarding fire ants [1775](#).

After the weekend's announcement, how refreshing it is to have a federal government that takes biosecurity and fire ants seriously. I recall that the previous agriculture minister, Mr Littleproud, was so disinterested in fire ants and biosecurity that he rarely held agriculture minister's meetings. Fire ants did not even register, let alone meetings. It is absolute hypocrisy. The only interest the former minister ever showed in the Gold Coast was when he tried to charge taxpayers for a trip to the Gold Coast. The hypocrisy and self-interest of the LNP is quite clear. If they ever get the chance to be in this chamber on the government benches they will cut and slash every bit of biosecurity, including the fire ant program. That is an alternative we cannot afford to not treat seriously. Only a Labor government will make sure we eradicate this pest, and we will work consistently with producers right across this wonderful state to protect the food and fibre they grow.