



Speech By  
**Tony Perrett**


**MEMBER FOR GYMPIE**

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Record of Proceedings, 6 March 2024

## MOTION

### Cost of Living, Select Committee

 **Mr PERRETT** (Gympie—LNP) (5.12 pm): I rise to support the LNP motion to establish a cost-of-living select committee. The government has paid lip-service to dealing with the cost-of-living pressures. The government promised a committee but has done nothing. It wanted to narrowly focus only on supermarket pricing, an issue which the Premier knows he has little ability to impact. The Premier's promises were nothing more than a grandstanding exercise to deflect the government's complicity in the cost-of-living crisis.

Supermarkets have taken farmers for a ride; they must be held to account. A genuine inquiry must look at how state government policies, taxes, charges, levies, actions and failures are dramatically impacting the cost of living for every Queenslanders. Pressures on commodity supply chains are pushing up costs. The government is responsible for rising electricity costs which are crippling families, businesses and primary producers.

This government failed to fix our major power plant at Callide, which has been offline for nearly three years. Power bills have risen 20 per cent, triple the national average. Some businesses are paying 40 per cent more. They either absorb it or pass on the cost. We have Australia's highest increase in insurance—18 per cent. It is been caused by out-of-control crime rates and a lack of flood resilience. Transport costs are up 4.2 per cent—the highest in the nation. They have been caused directly by the government's failure to maintain roads. We have the highest increase in water costs—16 per cent. Increased irrigation costs directly impact our grocery prices.

Newfound concerns about fruit and vegetables prices are welcome. The government has contributed to those prices. Pressures on commodity supply chains are pushing up costs. Farmers are price takers; they are not the price setters. They have been doing it tough for some time. The government has refused to deal with the issues where it has been responsible. The agriculture minister has been warned about this again and again and there have been pleas to do something because government policies are squeezing farmers. The minister has ignored warnings that government policies would push up the price of fresh seafood, meat, timber for renovation and building costs. Four and half years on it still has not delivered its promised timber action plan. The chronic timber shortage is fanned by the government's policies underpinned by two decades of systemic policy failures.

Since 2019 the government has been warned that fruit and vegetables growers were doing it tough, that farmers were making conscious decisions to not plant crops. Since then, debt levels have risen and are now at critical levels. Wherever I go across the state the message is the same: they have nowhere to go. They are being squeezed. The Queensland Fruit & Vegetable Growers cautioned against being 'sucked into' the 'easy narrative of farmer versus the supermarket, the underdog versus the duopoly'. It said '... let's not forget the government ... are responsible for increasing the cost to the grower. The policy pile-on during the last 18 months has dramatically changed the way growers operate.'

For 10 years as a senior minister or deputy premier, the now Premier has been present when all the decisions were made. Electricity, water, fuel, transport, registration, labour shortages and fertiliser costs have massively increased under this government and Queenslanders are paying the price. In October 2022 I warned about labour shortages pushing up fruit and vegetable prices. The *Queensland Country Life* warned about this with its heading 'Lack of workforce holds agriculture to ransom'. This government supported federal Labor's broken promise on the agriculture visa scheme. Growcom called the changes a 'poor consolation prize' and AgForce said it was 'rubbing salt into the wounds'. This government piles on the workload for growers. The Queensland Fruit & Vegetable Growers said—

It's relatively easy to make a new rule, however ... every change causes a chain reaction.

Farmers face rising costs from underfunding and mismanagement of biosecurity threats, the anti-dam agenda and the state of rural roads. Farmers face escalating costs from increased regulation, native title claims, vegetation laws and being sacrificed to reach environmental targets.

Last October the Queensland Fruit & Vegetable Growers cancelled its 100-year celebration saying it was inappropriate when the industry is currently enduring one of the most trying periods in recent history. If the Premier is genuine about the cost-of-living crisis, he would support this motion. Anything else is hypocritical.