




Speech By
Tony Perrett

MEMBER FOR GYMPIE

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PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENTS

Fire Ants

 **Mr PERRETT** (Gympie—LNP) (2.25 pm): A recent Senate inquiry heard that mismanagement of the Fire Ant Eradication Program is costing Gold Coast and Logan cities' struggling ratepayers millions. There is an absence of open data, failure to share information and to communicate, slow reaction to outbreaks, delays, disregard of any urgency, and ignored warnings. Since 2019, three reports have been scathing of the lack of progress, mismanagement of programs, funding shortfalls and KPI failures. Minister Furner has never fully implemented or accepted recommendations and refuses to implement independent assessments.

When I met with the Invasive Species Council yesterday they raised concerns about the systemic management and funding failures of the program for years. A report three years ago recommended a major change of plan, warning that the loss of momentum between 2015 and 2018 set the program back some years. The minister sat on the report and only released it last June.

Only two months later—in August—a new operational area was declared on the Gold Coast. The government only updated the biosecurity zone in December—a wasted four months. It meant that a large area of the Gold Coast was not following regulations regarding the movement of materials. The eradication program advises a minimum of three treatments per year for two years. Gold Coast had only two scheduled and the eradication zone was reduced from 10 to five kilometres.

Logan includes rural areas like Beaudesert, yet they only started receiving briefings six months ago. Minister Furner dismissed warnings about fire ants rafting during the 2022 floods. Logan's former mayor revealed that council officers watched them: 'They were floating—the officers could see them floating.' The Logan representative said—

The lack of consistent and clear communication over the past decade has severely constrained the ability for local government to play any meaningful roles, as well as public knowledge of the threat ...

Gold Coast said that communication was 'diabolical'. Both councils said that the government is not sharing open data. Gold Coast said that attempts to deliver it were unsuccessful and that any dialogue with the state does not necessarily deliver results. It is relying on informal relationships to learn what is going on. When Logan sought help eight years ago in 2016, former agriculture minister Donaldson said that local government participation did not align with the eradication plan. Now it has been told that from July Logan home owners and ratepayers are responsible for major surveillance and suppression activities, costing an estimated \$1.7 million over three years and millions extra in subsequent years. The mayor said that its ratepayer base is housing commission and it is struggling: 'We haven't got the money.'

Gold Coast now employs 13 full-time staff solely to deal with fire ants. It is estimated to cost \$6 million annually to treat and comes with a \$176 million cost to tourism. This cost to ratepayers is on top of the cost to primary producers, landowners, home owners, businesses and community organisations. Everyone is losing confidence.