




Speech By
Tony Perrett

MEMBER FOR GYMPIE

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MOTION

Far North Queensland, Infrastructure

 **Mr PERRETT** (Gympie—LNP) (5.10 pm): I rise to support the motion moved by the member for Chatsworth. The importance of the Barron River bridge as a key economic artery between Cairns and the Tablelands cannot be overstated. The member for Barron River told locals it was a ‘lifeline of connectivity’. Clearly, this was not repeated in Brisbane. The bridge is part of a corridor supporting more than a half a billion dollar agriculture sector. It is a major transport route for agricultural industries in the region. The region is home to livestock, cotton, dairy, cane and an extensive range of horticultural produce such as avocados, bananas, citrus, custard apples, exotic fruits, nuts, legumes, berries, maize, potato, peanuts, macadamias, mango, coffee and pineapples. It is a major food bowl, with the gross value of agriculture worth \$362 million in Mareeba plus \$240 million in the Tablelands.

The bridge is critical for growers and producers to transport to market efficiently and at a low cost. With trucks stuck at roadworks, those costs add up quickly. It is even worse when much of the stock is perishable. The government’s failure to fix this transport route hurts agricultural industries, rural communities and consumers at the check-out. The members for Cook and Barron River have overseen restrictions placed on transport which are impacting local businesses. B-doubles cannot travel on the corridor, which is currently restricted to single-cab trucks, with speculation of more restrictions. The *Cairns Post* reported yesterday—

In the face of greater heavy vehicle load limits being applied to the bridge, there is speculation further deterioration ... could lead to the banning of medium rigid trucks within the next 12 months.

It will become more difficult and costly and take longer to transport produce and increase congestion. Local truck drivers are reporting trips take double the time, with trips of up to four hours to travel between Mareeba and Cairns, often in bumper-to-bumper traffic. The Queensland Trucking Association told the *Cairns Post*—

Restrictions to the heavy vehicle industry will only increase costs, in addition to grocery items; ...

President of Queensland Fruit and Vegetable Growers, Joe Moro, warned when the bridge was reduced to one lane that ‘communities on the northern Tablelands, and areas to the west and south, deserve confidence to grow and develop’. Instead, it is becoming a liability for agricultural industries which cannot plan. Growers report that increased costs are being passed on and are seriously concerned about the unpredictability of the corridor. The region deserves better.

In the gallery today is the LNP’s candidate for Barron River, Bree James. She has been working relentlessly, together with the candidates for Cairns and Cook, Yolonde Entsch and David Kempton, to advocate for the region. They listen and stand up for their communities. Bree understands the importance of this bridge for those who live in the Cairns and Barron River electorates and those who live on the Tablelands in the Cook and Hill electorates. The region deserves voices loudly prosecuting the case for our agriculture industries. To date, they have had silence—silence from their local Labor

Party members, the members for Barron River and Cook, and silence from the government. The member for Cook is running from problems by relocating her office out of Mareeba. The silence is undermining the valuable agriculture industries of the region.

Ludicrously, yesterday the member for Barron River tried to blame his federal Labor colleagues saying that 'due to a federal government infrastructure freeze, \$240 million had not been available to advance the upgrade'. A week ago, he told the *Express* that his top three priorities were 'the bridge, the bridge, the bridge.' Both members have been there the whole time transport was reduced on the bridge while the government has put off dealing with it. The member has either said nothing or been ignored by his colleagues. He has sat around the cabinet table, and it appears there was silence. Yesterday, the state budget allocated \$15 million for relocating powerlines and waterlines. As the *Cairns Post* scathingly reported—

Just 3.3 per cent of a total \$450 million needed to replace the doomed ... bridge at Kuranda ... nowhere near enough to stave off a major handbrake to the region's economy before a new crossing is built.

Yet the member for Barron River boasted, 'I'm happy with this because this is what I was looking for.' It is shameful.