



Speech By
Tony Perrett

MEMBER FOR GYMPIE

Record of Proceedings, 20 August 2024


APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation Bill

Health, Environment and Agriculture Committee, Report

 **Mr PERRETT** (Gympie—LNP) (7.16 pm): I rise to speak on the Health, Environment and Agriculture Committee's estimates report. Estimates proved that the government has wasted 10 years and continues to fail the agriculture, fishing and forestry sectors and has failed rural and regional communities. Estimates failed to alleviate concerns about the government's sale of the Queensland agricultural colleges. After five years it remains shrouded in a lack of transparency. I raised that the successful tender for the former Longreach site went to a proponent that is not going to continue the educational component of the site. At a time when skills and labour shortages continue to cripple Queensland's agricultural industries, this is a significant concern. It demonstrates the government's lip-service to agricultural education and skills training. Not only is there a photo of the minister proudly locking the gates of the college; the college has essentially not retained a training component and was given away. In effect, that component is free. How can this be justified in the middle of an agricultural skills shortage?

The QATC ceased operations in 2019. Staff redundancies were taken care of and the asset sold in 2021. The government provided no reasonable explanation why another \$4 million has been allocated to finalise long-term decisions regarding the colleges. That \$4 million is in addition to the \$4 million capital grant and \$2.7 million capital project commitment two years ago and another \$4 million capital grant and \$2.1 million capital project commitment last year. We are told that the Emerald college has been earmarked for emergency accommodation, yet a whistleblower has informed the LNP that the accommodation on the site cannot be used as it is unsafe.

Estimates again highlighted the government's failure to competently deal with biosecurity risks. We know that fire ants are not surrounded, the biosecurity budget has been cut, the northernmost biosecurity defence facility at Coen was closed and Queensland faces significant risks of biosecurity outbreaks that could cripple industries. Last year we were told that fire ants were surrounded; now it is an arc. The government has no idea how many high-risk businesses are in the infested area and has no idea of the annual cost for business to comply with the minimum biosecurity requirements. Increased costs are being off-loaded onto businesses and ratepayers.

From 1 July, local councils are responsible for managing fire ants on their land including parks, sporting fields and reserves. Last July the Auditor-General recommended that Biosecurity Queensland could better assist councils to regulate biosecurity risks. Other than providing baits, the government

refuses to help local councils dealing with extra costs such as having to employ staff. Gold Coast City council ratepayers now fund 13 additional staff to deal with fire ants. It is ratepayers who are funding this, not the state government. The Auditor-General found that the fire ant program lacked data to support its plans, does not report on outcomes and does not report on how many fire ants are eradicated, how many they are trying to eradicate or how many they have failed to eradicate.

Questions remain about the government's commitment to the forestry industry. Promises are made, media events are manufactured and headline figures are announced but they always lack clarity. Five years ago the former premier announced the timber action plan. It was never delivered. A two-year study into sourcing future timber supplies was due at the end of 2021, but there is nothing. In June this year the Premier and Treasurer committed to the new Sustainable Timber Industry Framework. The minister responsible did not warrant one line in a media statement that was released by the government's media unit. There was not one word from the minister. How can Queenslanders trust anything this government announces when they know that commitments are made but never delivered? The minister could not answer where the \$200 million budgeted allocation for the framework is. The minister could not even answer over how many years it is supposed to be delivered. Given the previous history, the industry is justifiably sceptical at the latest announcement.

For several years fishers have been blindsided by decisions made with no consultancy and transparency. The estimates hearing again failed to alleviate serious concerns about data integrity and a lack of transparency about fish stock assessments, special fishing licences and compensation packages for the industry.

The estimates hearing confirmed that the government has failed the agriculture, forestry and fishing sectors. It is also failing regional and rural communities and failing Queenslanders.