



Speech By
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MEMBER FOR GYMPIE

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**QUEENSLAND FOOD FARMERS' COMMISSIONER BILL; CROSS-BORDER
COMMISSIONER BILL; NIGHT-LIFE ECONOMY COMMISSIONER BILL**

 **Mr PERRETT** (Gympie—LNP) (7.12 pm): I rise to speak in this cognate debate focusing on the Queensland Food Farmers' Commissioner Bill. According to the explanatory notes, the commissioner will improve price transparency, redress the power imbalance between supermarkets and suppliers, and provide a safe environment for complaints. It will be a statutory position, with an interim commissioner appointed for 12 months. The commissioner will assist producers with supplier arrangements with supermarkets and provide a range of consultative, advisory, mediation, transparency and advocacy functions. In an act of political cynicism, this is only urgent legislation because there is an election in 66 days. After a decade of being in power, the government has suddenly discovered that farmers are doing it tough. The government has wasted 10 years.

The Supermarket Pricing Select Committee inquiry recommended this position, yet, in a sign of tightly controlling the discussion, the government scrapped the ability for members to have their say on the committee report. The inquiry itself was deliberately restricted because it was, in essence, a grandstanding exercise to deflect the government's complicity in the cost-of-living crisis. It was about the narrative—the spin—of appearing to be doing something. It was paying lip-service to farmers and primary producers. The government never wanted to include any cost that it is responsible for imposing on producers. There was no attempt to look at reducing costs to the farmers or primary producers.

Ten years of the state government's policies, taxes, levies, charges, actions and failures have increased direct and indirect costs for producers. They are imposed at the expense of prices and profitability for farmers. Farmers face rising costs from the underfunding and mismanagement of biosecurity threats, the anti-dam agenda, rising electricity prices and the state of rural roads. Farmers face escalating costs from increased regulation, native title claims, vegetation laws and being the sacrificial lamb to reach environmental targets. Pressures on commodity supply chains push up costs.

The government's new-found concern about fruit and vegetable prices is welcome. Supermarkets have been taking farmers for a ride. They must absolutely be held to account. Farmers are price takers; they are not price setters. However, farmers have been doing it tough for some time. The agriculture minister has been warned again and again to do something because government policies are squeezing farmers. For years the government has refused to deal with it. Five years ago, the government was warned about fruit and vegetable growers doing it tough. Since 2019 it was warned that farmers were making decisions not to plant crops. Since then, debt levels have risen and are now critical. Across the state I hear the same message: 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 cabinet minister or deputy premier, the Premier was there. He participated in all of the decisions. Electricity, water, fuel, transport, registration, labour shortages and fertiliser costs have increased significantly under this government. In October 2022 I warned about labour shortages pushing up fruit and vegetable prices. *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.

Last October the Queensland Fruit & Vegetable Growers called off its 100-year celebration, saying it was inappropriate when the industry was currently enduring one of the most trying periods in recent history. It said that the industry was grappling with financial, mental, emotional and physical hardships with substantial investment needed to weather the current challenges and survive. If the Premier and Labor government is genuine about helping farmers he must address this complicity in increasing farmers costs. If the Premier is genuine about reducing fruit and vegetable prices, he must address the state's role in increasing farmers' costs. To do anything else is hypocrisy. Let's hope this attempt by government works.