




Speech By
Bree James

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

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MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Fuel Security

 **Ms JAMES** (Barron River—LNP) (2.32 pm): In Far North Queensland fuel prices are not only impacting drivers on their daily commute to work and school drop-off; fuel shortages and fuel costs are impacting our farmers, our tourism industry and our regional communities and small business owners who rely on visitors to survive. Nowhere is that more obvious than in Far North Queensland. One in seven people are employed in tourism in our region, and our farmers produce so much food, including 98 per cent of the bananas for Australia.

It is already hard enough in our region with the recent weather events, let alone this fuel fragility facing Far North Queensland and Australia. My heart breaks for the tourism operators impacted by this fuel crisis. A national reef operator in Far North Queensland will see fuel expenses increase by \$1 million from February to the end of the financial year in June. That is \$1 million in unexpected costs. Another operator is facing \$6,000 in additional fuel costs every single day. That is over \$100,000 per month in increases. These costs are hitting operators in the pocket and threatening their ability to run tours both on the ground and in our oceans. The big problem is that they sold these tours six months or a year ago and have to honour that price. This means they will be running these tours at a huge loss. We have nearly gotten through our quiet, wet season and we are now coming into the peak tourism season to make up for it, but my fear is that many of these businesses are going to be in a world of pain if they do not make profits during our high season.

Ms Pease interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Krause): Member for Lytton, you are warned.

Ms JAMES: With a cost-of-living crisis, drive tourism to our region is also at significant risk, especially to the tip of Cape York where fuel is of dire concern. There is also a real risk of flight costs to our region skyrocketing. I know one person looked at a flight three days ago and it has increased by \$600 already. These figures make the reality crystal clear: fuel price increases are not just hurting hip pockets at the bowser; they are putting jobs, tourism and regional livelihoods at risk.

A fact that many people do not know is that from Cooktown to Cape York these communities are totally reliant on diesel to run generators as they are not on mains power. If we cannot keep the flow of diesel into these regions, they will not even be able to flush a toilet, let alone be saved in one of the hospitals there.

Mr Healy interjected.

Ms Enoch interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Cairns and member for Algeester, your interjections are not being taken.

Ms JAMES: This is also devastating our farming community. One farmer tells me their freight levies have jumped from 13 per cent to 44 per cent in two weeks. This is not abstract; it directly reduces a farmer's ability to ship produce to markets within Australia. Farmers must spend more just to keep crops viable—like the \$100,000 needed for fertiliser next season that they cannot afford to buy now but they are because without it there is no crop next year and there is a real risk they will not be able to get it in a few months time. Even our prawn trawlers cannot justify the extra cost for fuel to go out and get prawns for our plates at Easter time. This affects not only local markets but also national distribution, reducing available food in other states and increasing pressure on the agricultural sector.

Independent fuel suppliers, like Speewah Country Tavern and Marano's Fuel, are under severe pressure as they are struggling to even get fuel delivered to their servos as the majors are getting priority. This morning I spoke to Michele from Speewah Country Tavern, one of my local taverns which also has accommodation and a servo attached.

Mrs Nightingale interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Inala, you are warned.

Ms JAMES: They are currently down to zero diesel and they have two days left of petrol. Customers are desperate, with some asking for her used cooking oil to make their own diesel. The tavern had to limit diesel to 40 litres per day, and today they had to turn away the local school bus, forcing it to drive 30 minutes to Mareeba for fuel as they do not have any. There is no guarantee of a supplier arriving tomorrow either. This is their reality. Through heartache and frustration, Michele told me, 'The federal government is blind to regional Australia. They don't care about us.' This needs to stop. These are real stories, real people and real concerns in my community.

Mr Furner interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Ferny Grove, you are warned.

Ms JAMES: We need urgent action from the federal government to ensure that fuel flows to regional Queensland—not just to the major fuel stations but to the small business owners like Michele and Laurie at Speewah and Marano's Fuel across Cairns. I quote our Premier: 'It is a national crisis that needs a national solution.' I commend the Treasurer for writing to the ACCC, which are now monitoring fuel prices weekly across capital cities and more than 190 regional locations. The federal government has the data. It can see the pressure building in regional economies like Far North Queensland. The federal Labor Party holds the key policy levers, including fuel excise. This is not beyond its control; this is a matter of urgency and a matter of choice. Senator Green needs to stand up to her Labor federal mates and ensure Far North Queensland is not forgotten, especially our tourism industry.