

2016 – 17 Budget Estimates

Report No. 20, 55th Parliament
Agriculture and Environment Committee
August 2016

AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

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Chair's Foreword

This report presents a summary of the committee's examination of the budget estimates for the 2016-17 financial year contained in the Appropriation Bill 2016 for the committee's areas of responsibility: Agriculture and Fisheries; Environment and Heritage Protection; and National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef.

The committee recommends that the proposed expenditure be agreed to by the Legislative Assembly without amendment.

On behalf of the committee, I wish to thank Ministers, Directors-General, Chief Executive Officers and advisors for their assistance during our examination of the budget estimates.



Glenn Butcher MP
Chair

August 2016

1. Introduction

1.1 Role of the committee

The Agriculture and Environment Committee (the committee) is a portfolio committee of the Queensland Parliament required under section 88 of the *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001* and established under the Standing Rules and Orders.

The committee's areas of responsibility are:

- agriculture and fisheries; and
- environment and heritage protection, national parks and the Great Barrier Reef.¹

On 17 June 2016, the Appropriation Bill 2016 and the estimates for the committee's area of responsibility were referred to the committee for investigation and report.²

On 22 July 2016, the committee conducted a public hearing and took evidence about the proposed expenditure from the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries, the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef, and other witnesses. A copy of the transcript of the committee's hearing can be accessed at: www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/hansard/2016/2016_07_22_EstimatesAEC.pdf.

1.2 Aim of this report

The committee considered the estimates referred to it by using information contained in:

- budget papers
- answers to pre-hearing questions on notice
- evidence taken at the hearing
- additional information given in relation to answers.

This report summarises the estimates referred to the committee and highlights some of the issues the committee examined.

Prior to the public hearing, the committee provided the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries, and the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef with questions on notice in relation to the estimates. Responses to all the questions were received.

Answers to the committee's pre-hearing questions on notice; documents tabled during the hearing; answers and additional information provided by Ministers after the hearing; and minutes of the committee's meetings are included in a volume of additional information tabled with this report.

¹ Standing Rules and Orders, Schedule 6. The schedule provides that departments, statutory authorities, government owned corporations or other administrative units related to the relevant Minister's responsibilities regarding these areas are included.

² Standing Order 177 provides for the automatic referral of the Annual Appropriation Bills to portfolio committees once the Bills have been read a second time.

1.3 Other Members' participation

The committee gave leave for other Members to participate in the hearing. The following Members participated in the hearing:

- Mr Tim Nicholls MP, Leader of the Opposition and Member for Clayfield
- Ms Deb Frecklington MP, Deputy Leader of the Opposition and Member for Nanango
- Mr Dale Last MP, Shadow Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and Member for Burdekin
- Dr Christian Rowan MP, Shadow Minister for the Environment and Heritage Protection and Shadow Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef and Member for Moggill
- Mr Jeff Seeney MP, Member for Callide
- Mr Shane Knuth MP, Member for Dalrymple, and
- Mrs Jo-Ann Miller MP, Member for Bundamba.

2. Recommendation

Pursuant to Standing Order 187(1), the committee must state whether the proposed expenditures referred to it are agreed to.

Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that the proposed expenditure, as detailed in the Appropriation Bill 2016 for the committee's areas of responsibility, be agreed to by the Legislative Assembly without amendment.

3. Estimates for the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries

The following sections provide information on the estimates, objectives and service delivery highlights for entities that fall within the agriculture and fisheries portfolio. These entities are: the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF); Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges; and QRAA.³

3.1 Department of Agriculture and Fisheries

The department's objectives are to:

- create the conditions for successful agribusinesses and supply chains which encourage innovation and productivity
- assist people in agribusinesses to respond to challenges and protect environmental values, and
- ensure the sustainable management of natural resources to underpin productivity and advocating for the protection of the environment.⁴

The following table compares the appropriations for DAF for 2015-16 and 2016-17.

Appropriations	2015-16 \$'000	2016-17 \$'000
<i>Controlled Items</i>		
departmental services	312,340	304,818
equity adjustment	(5,484)	(5,613)
<i>Administered Items</i>	11,148	13,070
Vote	301,451	312,275

Source: Appropriation Bill 2016, Schedule 2, p 7.

3.1.1 Budget highlights

2016-17 budget highlights for DAF, according to its Service Delivery Statement, include:

Service Area 1: Agriculture

- Providing counselling services and other drought relief measures, and establishing the Queensland Climate Risk and Drought Resilience program to improve farm business capacity, seasonal forecasting and decision support tools to better manage climate risk.
- Implementing the Rural Assistance Package aimed at reducing financial stress and improving financial sustainability to assist the sector service debt.
- Advancing Queensland's agricultural innovation through the implementation of the ten year Agriculture and Food Research Development and Extension Blueprint.
- Providing further funding to develop new and innovative ways of commercialising the department's intellectual property.

³ The Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority was rebranded as 'QRAA' on 12 October 2004 by amendments to Part 2 of the *Rural and Regional Adjustment Act 1994*. See also s 52 of the same Act.

⁴ Queensland Budget Papers, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (2016) 2.

- Continuing to support agricultural industries in reef catchments to improve Great Barrier Reef water quality by:
 - co-ordinating on-ground support services, including extension capacity building, and specialised extension services such as economic analysis to support the industry-led, best management practice programs;
 - validating improved management practices against specific criteria;
 - monitoring the adoption of these practices by producers; and
 - funding innovation for new technologies such as developing a spray rig for precision application of herbicides.
- In conjunction with industry, supporting the Minister to undertake outbound trade missions showcasing Queensland's agricultural products and expertise and areas for investment in agriculture and the food and fibre supply chain.
- Progressing initiatives of the Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance under the collaborative agreements established with industry bodies.
- Developing a Customer Engagement Strategy that will transform the way the department engages with its customers.⁵

Service Area 2: Biosecurity Queensland

- Investing an additional \$10.8 million over four years to improve the capability of Queensland's biosecurity system to:
 - ensure compliance with the *Biosecurity Act 2014* and the *Exhibited Animals Act 2015*
 - outline roles and responsibilities of all key stakeholders within the biosecurity system
 - better target and coordinate the efforts of diverse groups working to support biosecurity;
 - enhance biosecurity incident preparedness and response capability
 - provide greater consistency and transparency in internal resource allocations
 - boost marine pest preparedness and prevention and enhance diagnostic services, and
 - improve biosecurity information management with the ongoing development of the Biosecurity Information Management System.
- Investing \$7.3 million for the ongoing management of Panama disease tropical race 4 in bananas.
- Continuing nationally significant biosecurity eradication responses including Red Witchweed, Four Tropical Weeds and Exotic Fruit Fly in the Torres Strait.
- Increasing funding to \$500,000 per annum for the RSPCA to ensure adequate regulatory compliance with the new dog breeding provisions in the *Animal Care and Protection Act 2001*.
- Jointly with the Commonwealth Government, providing additional funding for the better control of weeds and pest animals in drought affected areas, including:
 - constructing cluster fencing in central and south western Queensland to help keep out wild dogs;

⁵ Queensland Budget Papers, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (2016) 3-4.

- aerial baiting of wild dogs in the Southern Downs and Goondiwindi Regional Council areas; and
- working with the Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance and training sector to make provide accredited training in vertebrate pest management at subsidised rates.⁶

Service Area 3: Fisheries and Forestry

- Developing a fisheries resource allocation policy based on maximising economic value.
- Reforming regulatory arrangements governing Queensland fisheries across all sectors.
- Reviewing the regulatory structure of commercial fishing to ensure the sustainability of Queensland's fisheries.
- Releasing a discussion paper on the Charter Fishing Action Plan.
- Engaging with both recreational and commercial fishing organisations to investigate how a commercial net-free fishing area can be best instituted to obtain the maximum gain from the fisheries resource in Moreton Bay for the benefit of the region.
- Commencing implementation of initiatives outlined in the Queensland Aquaculture Policy Statement.
- Continuing to implement a range of actions identified in the joint industry/government Queensland Forest and Timber Industry Plan (developed in 2012).
- Implementing the forest and timber industry research, development and extension program in consultation with industry.
- Continuing to fulfil the State's contracted supply commitments for native forest log timber, other forest products and quarry material.⁷

3.2 Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges

The Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges (QATC) support the sustainability of agricultural, rural and related industries and communities by improving the knowledge and skills of the existing and future workforce.

QATC did not receive any funding from the 2015-16 appropriation, and will not receive any funds from the Appropriation Bill 2016.

3.3 QRAA

QRAA's strategic intent is to achieve self-sufficiency through financial leadership, service delivery excellence, business growth and capability. QRAA is a specialist service delivery program that provides loans, grants, rebates and subsidies.

QRAA is expected to be replaced by the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority (QRIDA) within the 2016-17 financial year.

QRAA did not receive any funding from the 2015-16 appropriation, and will not receive any funds from the Appropriation Bill 2016.

⁶ Queensland Budget Papers, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (2016) 6.

⁷ Queensland Budget Papers, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (2016) 8.

3.4 Issues raised at the public hearing

Issues examined in relation to the Agriculture and Fisheries portfolio include:

- the establishment of the Office of Rural Affairs and the recruitment of a Rural Affairs Commissioner;
- the conducting of a rural debt survey by the Rural Affairs Commissioner (once appointed);
- the transition of QRAA into QRIDA;
- the expected relationship between QRIDA and the Commonwealth-level Regional Investment Corporation;
- the importance of value-adding in the beef industry supply chain;
- the impact of re-regulation of the sugar industry on producers;
- efforts to ensure rural business viability through the Rural Assistance Scheme;
- efforts to enable the dairy industry to seek export markets, and thereby ensure price stability;
- biological controls for established weed species, including prickly acacia;
- the scrapping of the protected zone for Johne's Disease;
- the First Start Program and Sustainability Program for primary producers; and
- the absence of tied funding to specifically address 'wastage' in greyhound racing.⁸

⁸ Queensland Estimates Hearings, 22 July 2016, 2-41.

4. Estimates for the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef

The following sections provide information on the estimates, objectives and service delivery highlights for entities that fall within the environment and heritage protection, national parks and the Great Barrier Reef portfolios. These entities are: the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (DEHP); and the National Parks sections of the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing (DNPSR).

4.1 Department of Environment and Heritage Protection

The department's objective is to manage the Queensland Government's key environmental priorities:

- conserving nature at both the species and landscape levels
- protecting the Great Barrier Reef
- protecting sites of significant heritage value
- avoiding, minimising or mitigating negative effects on the environment, and
- providing efficient, responsive and integrated services.⁹

The following table compares the appropriations for DEHP for 2015-16 and 2016-17.

Appropriations	2015-16 \$'000	2016-17 \$'000
<i>Controlled Items</i>		
departmental services	152,818	169,041
equity adjustment	5,288	5,314
<i>Administered Items</i>	-	-
Vote	158,106	174,355

Source: Appropriation Bill 2016, Schedule 2, pp 8-9.

4.1.1 Budget highlights

2016-17 budget highlights for DEHP, according to its Service Delivery Statement, include:

- Overseeing implementation of the Reef 2050 Long Term Sustainability Plan and the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan.
- Coordinating the Queensland Government Great Barrier Reef Investment plan.
- Coordinating the implementation of the Government's response to the recommendations of the Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce.
- Providing an additional \$1.9 million to facilitate improved waste management and resource recovery to help grow the waste management industry and improve associated employment opportunities in Queensland.

⁹ Queensland Budget Papers, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (2016) 2.

- Receiving an additional \$6.8 million over four years to lead the development of the Government's climate change strategies, including climate change adaptation, climate change mitigation and adapting to coastal hazards.
- Enhancing the sustainable use of groundwater by the resource industry through administration of the underground water management framework of Chapter 3 of the *Water Act 2000*.
- Providing an additional \$1.1 million to develop a best practice regulatory framework and enhance compliance and licencing activities for Queensland's biofuels industry, and a further \$140,000 to implement the Biofutures Roadmap and Action Plan.
- Continuing to expand the water quality report card system.¹⁰

4.2 Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing

The National Parks service area of DNPSR manages parks and forests to sustain their natural and cultural value, in partnership with Traditional Owners and other organisations. It also maintains marine and island ecosystems through the Great Barrier Reef field management program. These create jobs and a diverse economy by:

- partnering to support Queensland's tourism aspirations and deliver sustainable ecotourism experiences;
- supporting partnerships with Traditional Owners for services on protected areas; and
- building and maintaining park management, visitor and tourism infrastructure.¹¹

The following table compares the appropriations for DNPSR for 2015-16 and 2016-17.

Appropriations	2015-16 \$'000	2016-17 \$'000
<i>Controlled Items</i>		
departmental services	347,381	343,549
equity adjustment	(28,121)	(32,256)
<i>Administered Items</i>	41,754	67,606
Vote	361,014	378,899

Source: Appropriation Bill 2016, Schedule 2, p 10.

4.2.1 Budget highlights

2016-17 budget highlights for the National Parks service area of DNPSR, according to its Service Delivery Statement, include:

- Continuing to progress reforms to the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (the Act) to reinstate the conservation of nature as the object of the Act and ensure protected areas are managed for the conservation of nature and the cardinal principle for national parks management.
- Partnering with DEHP to progress long-term protected area policy for the acquisition and management of the Protected Area Estate.

¹⁰ Queensland Budget Papers, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (2016) 3.

¹¹ Queensland Budget Papers, Service Delivery Statements, Department of National Parks, Sport and Recreation (2016) 3.

- Investing \$13.2 million in the management of traditional lands in Cape York Peninsula, jointly with the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships.
- Delivering joint management arrangements in the North Stradbroke Island area, including Naree Budjong Djara National Park.
- Providing \$6 million to enable the establishment and ongoing management of properties acquired for the Protected Area Estate.
- Delivering departmental contributions to the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan, including progressing the declaration of new fish habitat areas on the central Queensland coast and delivering the Raine Island recovery project.
- Working with the Commonwealth Government to ensure a sustainable forward funding framework for the Great Barrier Reef Field Management Program, including a joint commitment to funding indexation levels.
- Progressing departmental initiatives in the Queensland Ecotourism Plan, including ecotourism facilities proposals for protected areas.
- Implementing a new online booking service to improve customer experience for camping and vehicle access permits.
- Progressing protected area management frameworks, including management planning instruments, management effectiveness evaluation, and levels of service.¹²

4.3 Issues raised at the public hearing

Issues examined in relation to the environment and heritage protection, national parks and the Great Barrier Reef portfolios include:

- approvals of new mines since the end of January 2015.
- the possibility of a carbon tax or carbon trading scheme in Queensland.
- the purchase of land for use as koala habitat.
- steps taken to ensure that resources projects' financial assurance is appropriate and up-to-date.
- the amount of financial assurance forfeited in recent financial years.
- the availability of advice to builders regarding the construction of energy-efficient and environmentally sustainable dwellings.
- the recruitment of additional rangers to manage newly-declared national parks.
- conducting control burns in drought-affected areas.
- upcoming capital works and infrastructure projects in national parks.
- increasing the base-level funding to the Field Management Program on the Great Barrier Reef.
- consultation with commercial fishing interests regarding world heritage nominations for the Cooloola section of the Great Sandy National Park as part of an expanded Fraser Island World Heritage Area, as well as several parks of Cape York, and
- measures being undertaken to increase the availability of Pokémon in Queensland's national parks.¹³

¹² Queensland Budget Papers, Service Delivery Statements, Department of National Parks, Sport and Recreation (2016) 4.

¹³ Queensland Estimates Hearings, 22 July 2016, 44-83.

Statement of Reservation



Opposition Members' Statement of Reservation

Agriculture and Environment Committee

The Palaszczuk Labor Government's second Budget is a document characterised by raids, write-downs, rip-offs, a few 'sugar hits', but no long-term economic plan to create real jobs and grow the Queensland economy.

The Agriculture and Environment Committee reviewed the Budget for the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries, Hon Leanne Donaldson, and the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef, Hon Steven Miles.

Agriculture and Fisheries

With cuts to spending in the order of 2.5 per cent and several vague 'new' policy projects being pursued, the Opposition has significant concerns over the Palaszczuk Government's commitment to Agriculture and Fisheries and the delivery of key frontline services that Queensland's productive primary industries need. Moreover, Estimates yet again revealed that the Government's most junior Minister has little grasp of industry issues and time and again was unable to provide direct answers to simple questions, constantly deferring to bureaucrats during the course of the Estimates hearing.

Particularly concerning was the Minister's failure to clearly articulate what consultation she and the government had undertaken with Queensland's 18,500 to 19,000 commercial beef and dairy producers regarding her decision to dump Queensland's 'protected zone' status for bovine Johne's disease. The Minister totally ignored the clear advice and wishes of the Queensland dairy industry and was unable to point to any genuine consultation with the broader beef industry despite having the database in government at her disposal to do so. The decision and the failure to properly consult stands as lazy and reckless with the Minister unable to provide any assurance whatsoever to allay fears of the potential of the wasting disease to spread into clean herds as a result of her decision.

The 'tick line' was another key biosecurity issue where the Minister was found wanting, not just on policy but on lack of consultation and commitment to listen to the wishes and needs of landholders along the line, particularly those who've invested lots of time and funds in dealing with ticks.

The other key biosecurity area where the Minister was very vague was fire ants. While national funding for eradication looks to be continuing for the foreseeable future, there appears to be no plan in the Minister's office for fall-back for containment and what that will be mean for Queensland taxpayers.

The capital budget for the Department looks to provide mostly for maintenance and some upgrading. Funding is allocated to purchase a research farm in partnership with GRDC (\$1m) and for RSPCA (\$1.5m) for facility upgrades. In both cases, less than should have been provided.

The Opposition is concerned the Minister will waste very scarce resources with the proposed new \$2m Office of Rural Affairs. The Minister was unable to answer simple questions about its charter, where it would be based, whether its head or ‘Commissioner’ would work full-time or part-time, let alone what the staff would actually do. Indeed, during questioning the Minister revealed that funding for the new office would be \$250,000 in new money and \$250,000 ‘in-kind’ over four years. Given the likely salary package of the new ‘Commissioner’ and on-costs including travel, there appears to be nothing much left for any other staff, nor the resources to undertake any real work.

Ditto for resources for the Minister’s Fisheries ‘Green Paper’ and where the long-delayed overhaul of Fisheries management is headed. While the Minister attempted to spruik the benefits of her green paper, its release the day prior to the AEC Estimates hearing was seen as an insult by many stakeholders, particularly in the commercial fishing and seafood industries. The on-line feedback pages, with their simplistic, ‘motherhood’ questions are clearly aimed at encouraging web readers to tick and approve a policy shift that in many aspects is little more than a re-allocation of fish stocks and resources without a shred of scientific data.

Again the Opposition is concerned the Minister is not consulting with key stakeholders and copying the antics of the previous Minister in running policy that’s entirely based on politics and counter to large sections of regional industry that supports smaller, family-run businesses and thousands of jobs. At a time when the Government’s own data shows a large drop in the commercial fishing GVP, the Minister’s green paper will seriously damage what confidence remains in the sector.

Further, it was noted that the Minister has made no significant commitment to Fisheries for improved compliance of existing regulations, while floating the very worrying new policy of cutting harvests (commercial and rec) by 40 to 50 per cent, without a shred of independent scientific data to support the cuts.

The Opposition was underwhelmed by the Minister’s failure to explain her government’s plans for the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority (QRAA) and its revamp into the new Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority (QRIDA). It sounded as though little to no thought had been given to the Federal Government’s announcement to establish a ‘Regional Investment Corporation’ (RIC) to administer drought and hardship concessional loans, which would render much of what QRAA and its 100-odd staff currently does redundant. This is an area that will need on-going scrutiny, if only to ensure that taxpayers’ money is not being wasted on duplicated/redundant services.

Of further concern was the refusal by the Minister to outline what, if any, discussions she had undertaken with the Deputy-Premier regarding the potential impact of the Government’s proposed vegetation management law changes. The Minister’s refusal to engage on this important issue raises serious questions about her understanding and commitment to genuinely supporting a productive farm sector.

Environment and Heritage Protection, National Park and the Great Barrier Reef

The Opposition is very concerned with many areas of the portfolio, especially its obvious use by the Government and the Minister as a ‘political tool’ on key hot-button, voter issues – such as the Great Barrier Reef, koalas, and World Heritage listings etc.

The Minister was unable to provide simple and clear answers on mining application approvals and at times appeared to almost deliberately vague, eventually agreeing to take a number of straightforward questions on notice.

Estimates revealed there is no new money for koala habitat areas compared with the \$15m provided in 2015-16. Again the Minister's vagueness on this point and his inability to cite any scientific data for this decision (not to fund the purchase of habitat areas) was puzzling and worrying and appears to be a complete reversal of the focus that was held-up as necessary to save the species last year. This can only be described as policy inconsistency at taxpayers' expense.

Turning to National Parks, an area of concern was the projected growth in visits which did not appear to be evidence-based and will probably not be achieved. The forecasts from the government appear inflated and as they are tied to predicted income from user fees and charges (projected to be up 20.5 per cent to \$26.311m) leave a cloud over operating funds for national parks

Like his predecessor in the Agriculture and Fisheries session, the Environment Minister would appear to be playing politics with the businesses and jobs in the commercial fishing sector, particularly around the Fraser Coast – Tin Can Bay and Hervey Bay – with his plans for further World Heritage listings. The Minister appears to have no regard for the economic impact any additional area listing would have on many family-run businesses and the hundreds of local jobs that are directly supported by commercial fishing.

Coming on top of the release of the government's 'Green Paper' on fisheries management the Minister's move to expand World Heritage listed area around the Fraser Coast is a very worrying signal from a government that has been shown-up for running fishing policy on base politics with not a shred of supporting scientific data.

Sincerely



Tony Perrett MP
Member for Gympie
Deputy Chair, Agriculture and Environment Committee

