

2017 – 18 Budget Estimates

Report No. 38, 55th Parliament
Agriculture and Environment Committee
August 2017

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 2017-18 financial year contained in the Appropriation Bill 2017 for the committee's areas of responsibility: Agriculture, Fisheries and Rural Economic Development; 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.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joe Kelly', is positioned above the printed name and title.

Joe Kelly MP
Chair

August 2017

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:

- Environment and Heritage Protection
- National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef, and
- Agriculture, Fisheries and Rural Economic Development.¹

On 16 June 2017, the Appropriation Bill 2017 and the estimates for the committee's area of responsibility were referred to the committee for investigation and report.²

On 21 July 2017, the committee conducted public hearings and took evidence about the proposed expenditure from the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Economic Development, 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 hearings can be accessed at:

http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/hansard/2017/2017_07_21_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, and
- 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 hearings, the committee provided the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Economic Development, 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 hearings; 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 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, 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 2017 for the committee's areas of responsibility, be agreed to by the Legislative Assembly without amendment.

3. Agriculture, Fisheries and Rural Economic Development

The following sections provide information on the estimates, objectives and service delivery highlights for entities that fall within the Agriculture, Fisheries and Rural Economic Development portfolio. These entities are:

- the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries
- Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges, and
- Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority.³

3.1 Department of Agriculture and Fisheries

The Hon Bill Byrne MP is the Minister responsible for the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF). The department has three service areas as follows:

- Agriculture
- Biosecurity Queensland, and
- Fisheries and Forestry.

The objectives of DAF are to:

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

The following table taken from the Appropriation Bill 2017 compares the appropriations for DAF for 2016-17 and 2017-18.

Appropriations	2016-17 \$'000	2017-18 \$'000
<i>Controlled Items</i>		
departmental services	304,818	287,832
equity adjustment	(5,613)	(4,138)
<i>Administered Items</i>	13,070	14,028
Vote	312,275	297,722

Source: Appropriation Bill 2017, Schedule 2, p 7.

³ The QRAA was rebranded as the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority as part of the amendments to Part 2 of the *Rural and Regional Adjustment Act 1994* which were assented to on 30 March 2017.

⁴ Queensland Budget Papers, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (2017), p 3.

3.1.1 Budget highlights – Department of Agriculture and Fisheries

2017-18 budget highlights for DAF, according to its Service Delivery Statement, include:

Service Area 1: Agriculture

- providing \$5.2 million over three years for the Rural Economic Development package, working with rural communities to identify regional economic opportunities, improve the competitiveness of rural businesses and increase the number of rural jobs
- continuing to partner with all levels of government and industry to overcome barriers and realise significant opportunities that Northern Australia offers for the intensification and diversification of agricultural production
- supporting implementation of the Queensland Government's Strategic Blueprint for Queensland's North West Minerals Province that is aimed at facilitating a strong and prosperous future for the region
- providing existing drought relief arrangements to drought affected communities and invest in the Queensland Climate Risk and Drought Resilience program to improve farm business capacity, seasonal forecasting and decision support tools that enable producers to better manage climate risk
- implementing the Agriculture and Food Research, Development and Extension Ten year Roadmap and Action plan, which aligns with the Advance Queensland agenda and drives innovation in Queensland's agricultural and food industries
- implementing the Technology Commercialisation Fund which is aimed at:
 - attracting private sector capital into agriculture and food research and development, undertaken by government, and government research partners
 - increasing the commercial success of the department's and its research partners' intellectual property
- continuing to support agricultural industries in reef catchments to improve Great Barrier Reef water quality outcomes by:
 - ensuring coordinated on-ground support services, including extension capacity building and collaboration, and specialised extension services such as economic analysis to support the industry-led, best management practice programs
 - validating improved and innovative management practices
 - monitoring the adoption of these practices by producers, and
- progressing initiatives of the Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance under the collaborative agreements established with industry bodies.

Service Area 2: Biosecurity Queensland

- implementing the Queensland biosecurity capability program including:
 - releasing the five year biosecurity strategy and action plan that embeds shared decision-making and outlines roles and responsibilities of all key stakeholders within the biosecurity system
 - undertaking a regional pilot with local government and natural resource management groups to develop a plan that outlines regional priorities and responsibilities that better target and coordinate the efforts of diverse groups working to support biosecurity and to leverage funding

- enhancing biosecurity incident preparedness and response capability - embed and continue to build a broad biosecurity network of expertise and capacity to respond in the event of a biosecurity outbreak
- implementing an investment framework to provide for greater consistency and transparency in the consideration of risk-based internal resource allocations
- boosting marine pest preparedness and prevention and enhance plant diagnostic services
- improving biosecurity information management with the ongoing development of the Biosecurity Information Management System
- continuing the response to white spot disease in prawns
- continuing nationally significant biosecurity responses and eradication programs including programs for red imported fire ants, electric ants, Panama disease tropical race 4, cucumber green mottle mosaic virus, red witchweed, four tropical weeds and exotic fruit fly in the Torres Strait
- continuing to assist regional collectives and landholders to better control weeds and pest animals affecting regional communities including:
 - constructing cluster fencing to control wild dogs
 - improving the management of Navua Sedge weed, and
- continuing to work with industries to develop the first ever accredited industry-led quality assurance schemes that enable market access for Queensland producers under contemporary biosecurity legislation.

Service Area 3: Fisheries and Forestry

- providing an additional \$20.9 million over three years to support the implementation of the Sustainable Fishing Strategy including 20 more frontline compliance officers, more monitoring and research, better engagement with industry and stakeholders and more responsive decision making
- identifying areas in aquaculture where development can be planned for, impacts on the environment minimised and approval processes streamlined
- releasing a discussion paper on the Charter Fishing Action Plan to identify ways to help grow a world class charter fishing industry
- fulfilling and effectively managing the State's contracted supply commitments for native forest log timber, other forest products and quarry material
- overseeing the plantation licence held by HQPlantations Pty Ltd, as well as the related agreements, on behalf of the State
- continuing to implement key actions in the Queensland Forest and Timber Industry Plan in conjunction with industry and service providers, and
- managing the forest and timber industry research, development and extension program to ensure that it is delivering industry-relevant outcomes.⁵

⁵ Queensland Budget Papers, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (2017), pp 4, 5, 7, 9.

3.2 Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges

Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges (QATC) is a specialist provider of vocational training and education to the agricultural sector. QATC aims to improve economic prosperity and sustainability of rural and related industries and communities by improving the knowledge and skills of its existing and future workforce.

QATC did not receive any funding from the 2016-17 appropriation, and will not receive any funds from the Appropriation Bill 2017.

3.3 Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority

Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority (QRIDA), formerly referred to as QRAA, is a specialist administrator of government financial assistance programs including loans, grants, rebates and subsidies. QRIDA's core responsibility is to administer the Queensland Government's Primary Industry Productivity Enhancement Scheme and when required, support the delivery of Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangement assistance for primary producers, small businesses and non-profit organisations (jointly funded by the Queensland and Australian Governments).

QRIDA did not receive any funding from the 2016-17 appropriation, and will not receive any funds from the Appropriation Bill 2017.

3.4 Issues raised at the public hearings

Issues raised by the committee in relation to Agriculture, Fisheries and Rural Economic Development included:

- change in expenses for DAF between 2016-17 and 2017-18
- grants for multi-peril insurance assessments
- testing of banana plants for Panama disease tropical race 4
- projects delivered to provide assistance to rural Queensland, including support provided to Oakey Beef Exports
- work completed under the fire ant program
- differences in staff numbers in DAF from 2014-15
- investment to deliver fisheries management reforms
- costs and strategies for the management of prickly acacia
- biosecurity regulations for white spot disease in prawns and assistance provided to affected prawn farmers
- costs and programs for the control of wild dogs
- loans provided by QRIDA
- work undertaken by the Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol
- assets of QATC, including procedures for the sale of properties, and
- decline in the number of Queensland dairy producers.⁶

⁶ Queensland Estimates Hearings, 21 July 2017, pp 2-43.

4. Environment and Heritage Protection, and 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 portfolio. These entities are:

- the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (EHP), and
- the National Parks service area of the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing (NPSR).

4.1 Department of Environment and Heritage Protection

The Hon Dr Steven Miles MP is the Minister responsible for EHP. The department has three service areas as follows:

- Environmental Protection Services
- Species and Ecosystem Protection Services, and
- Heritage Protection Services.

The department's objectives are to:

- conserve nature at both the species and landscape levels
- protect the Great Barrier Reef
- protect significant heritage places
- avoid, minimise or mitigate negative impacts on the environment, and
- provide efficient, responsive and integrated services.⁷

The following table taken from the Appropriation Bill 2017 compares the appropriations for EHP for 2016-17 and 2017-18.

Appropriations	2016-17 \$'000	2017-18 \$'000
<i>Controlled Items</i>		
departmental services	169,041	209,844
equity adjustment	5,314	6,237
<i>Administered Items</i>	-	-
Vote	174,355	216,081

Source: Appropriation Bill 2017, Schedule 2, p 9.

⁷ Queensland Budget Papers, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (2017), p 2.

4.1.1 Budget highlights – Department of Environment and Heritage Protection

2017-18 budget highlights for EHP, according to its Service Delivery Statement, include:

Service Area 1: Environmental Protection Service

- providing increased funding of \$15.4 million in 2017-18 (\$30.6 million over five years from 2016-17) to continue to prosecute allegations of serious environmental harm and commence rehabilitation of land affected by underground coal gasification contamination
- leading the implementation of Queensland's Container Refund Scheme and lightweight plastic shopping bag ban, with increased funding of \$2.5 million provided in 2017-18
- providing increased funding of \$5 million in 2017-18 (\$15 million over three years) to lead the development of the Government's climate change strategies
- providing \$1.4 million over three years (\$460,000 in 2017-18), funded through reprioritisation of departmental services, to identify sites and provide advice in relation to land impacted by fire-fighting foam contamination, and
- providing increased funding of \$8.7 million in 2017-18 (\$14.1 million over four years from 2017-18) for enhanced environmental regulatory services and public engagement channels.

Service Area 2: Species and Ecosystem Protection Services

- providing \$35 million in 2017-18 (\$175 million over five years) across several agencies for a comprehensive Great Barrier Reef Water Quality Program to support the continuation of critical programs to assist in working towards the achievement of water quality targets, including Best Practice Management programs, provision of economic support and decision-making tools for agricultural producers, the Paddock to Reef program and the Natural Resource Management Program for Reef Water Quality. This is in addition to the \$100 million provided over five years from 2015-16 to address the recommendations of the Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce
- providing additional funding of \$3.2 million in 2017-18 to support ongoing management of the Government's NatureAssist program to secure and maintain existing protected areas on private land in Queensland
- encouraging and supporting community groups, through the delivery of the Community Sustainability Action Grants program, to be more active in their local environment, including enabling them to increase their volunteer base and build on past investment by inviting innovation for new or alternative ways in which to undertake environmental conservation activities. This is the second year of a \$4 million per year (\$12 million over three years from 2016-17) grants program
- providing increased funding of \$945,000 in 2017-18 (increasing to \$2.6 million per year from 2019-20) to expand the Indigenous Land and Sea Rangers Program from 75 to 100 positions
- providing additional funding of \$916,000 in 2017-18 for a sustainable business partnership to develop a program that supports small and medium businesses to achieve resource efficiencies and environmental innovation
- providing additional funding of \$655,000 per year for the Junior Ranger Program. The program will engage youth and young adults in Aurukun in school and education programs providing a pathway to careers in conservation and land management, and
- providing additional funding of \$4.9 million in 2017-18 (\$8.4 million over three years from 2016-17) for the CarbonPlus Fund and to develop the capacity of Indigenous communities to

participate in commercial carbon offset markets. It is anticipated that the fund will offset two years of emissions generated by the Queensland Government vehicle fleet.

Service Area 3: Heritage Protection

- ensuring significant Queensland heritage places are identified and their values protected by:
 - enhancing policies and procedures designed to protect the State's built heritage
 - continuing to promote the value and increase community understanding of Queensland's heritage, and
 - continuing to review and update the State's heritage register.⁸

4.2 *Issues raised at the public hearings – Department of Environment and Heritage Protection*

Issues raised by the committee in relation to EHP included:

- funding provided to the Environmental Defenders Office
- regulation of waste tyre stockpiles
- the Indigenous Land and Sea Rangers Program
- environmental protection orders for coal seam gas operators
- establishment of the CarbonPlus Fund
- community education programs for crocodiles
- actions taken to respond to coral bleaching on the Great Barrier Reef
- costs for formal investigations into serious non-compliance
- delivery of the yellow crazy ant management program, and
- nuisance odour emissions from industries at Swanbank.⁹

4.3 *Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing*

As Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef, the Hon Dr Steven Miles MP is one of the ministers responsible for NPSR. NPSR has three service areas as follows:

- National Parks
- Sport and Recreation, and
- Racing.

The committee considered the estimates for the National Parks service area. The objective of this service area is to provide for the management of parks and forests to sustain natural and cultural

⁸ Queensland Budget Papers, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (2017), pp 3, 7, 9.

⁹ Queensland Estimates Hearings, 21 July 2017, pp 44-65.

values, build environmental resilience to ensure healthy species and ecosystems, and facilitate ecotourism, recreation and heritage experiences.¹⁰

The following table taken from the Appropriation Bill 2017 compares the appropriations for NPSR for 2016-17 and 2017-18.

Appropriations	2016-17 \$'000	2017-18 \$'000
<i>Controlled Items</i>		
departmental services	343,549	354,265
equity adjustment	(32,256)	6,780
<i>Administered Items</i>	67,606	31,819
Vote	378,899	392,864

Source: Appropriation Bill 2017, Schedule 2, p 10.

4.3.1 Budget highlights – National Parks

2017-18 budget highlights for the National Parks service area of NPSR, according to the NPSR Service Delivery Statement, include:

- providing additional funding of \$40 million over two years from 2017-18 to revitalise national parks and enhance nature-based opportunities and management of parks
- providing funding of \$3.3 million over two years, including additional funding of \$2.3 million, from 2016-17 to improve and upgrade facilities in the Daisy Hill Koala Bushland precinct in preparation for the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games
- allocating increased funding of \$1.3 million over three years, commencing in 2018-19, to support the operation of an additional vessel for the Great Barrier Reef Joint Field Management Program
- partnering with the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection to progress a long-term protected area strategy for the acquisition and management of the protected area estate
- delivering joint management arrangements in the North Stradbroke Island area, including Naree Budjong Djara National Park, and on Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal land national parks
- delivering departmental contributions to the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan, including the Raine Island Recovery Project
- working with the Australian Government to ensure a sustainable forward funding framework for the Great Barrier Reef Field Management Program
- implementing departmental initiatives in the Queensland Ecotourism Plan, including ecotourism facilities proposals and the Queensland Eco and Sustainable Tourism initiative on protected areas
- progressing Significant Regional Infrastructure Projects Program initiatives to redevelop Mon Repos Turtle Centre and expand the public mooring and reef protection program in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area

¹⁰ Queensland Budget Papers, Service Delivery Statements, Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing (2017), p 3.

- advancing protected area management frameworks, including management planning instruments, management effectiveness evaluation, and levels of service
- continuing preparation of the ex-HMAS Tobruk as a regional tourism dive destination for the Wide Bay area
- progressing towards an integrated permit management solution for parks and forests
- delivering appropriate management capability including planning instruments, rangers and infrastructure in newly dedicated national parks
- partnering with industry and the community to deliver shared portfolio outcomes throughout regional Queensland, including events and activities on parks and forests with active recreation, tourism and economic benefits, and
- progressing a framework to guide management and identify recreation and tourism opportunities at Daisy Hill Koala Bushland precinct.¹¹

4.4 Issues raised at the public hearings – National Parks

Issues raised by the committee in relation to National Parks included:

- work undertaken by Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service in response to Cyclone Debbie
- improving customer experience in the online booking service for camping and vehicle access permits
- funding for pest and weed management in national parks
- funding and work undertaken for the Great Barrier Reef Field Management Program
- number of rangers employed by Queensland Parks and Wildlife Services
- delivery of the Raine Island Recovery Project
- preservation of lighthouses at Middle Bluff and North Bluff
- the fire management program for national parks
- ecotourism in national parks, marine parks and other protected areas, and
- funding and operational arrangements for the management of North Stradbroke Island.¹²

¹¹ Queensland Budget Papers, Service Delivery Statements, Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing (2017), pp 3-4.

¹² Queensland Estimates Hearings, 21 July 2017, pp 65-86.

Statement of Reservation



Opposition Members Statement of Reservation

Agriculture and Environment Committee

The Palaszczuk Labor Government's third Budget is a document with no economic plan to create employment and no plan to grow the Queensland economy. It is full of rhetoric, lacks substance and shows no strong leadership for our state.

The Agriculture and Environment Committee reviewed the Budget for the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries, Hon Bill Byrne, and the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protections and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef, Hon Steven Miles.

Agriculture and Fisheries

Labor once again have shown that they are no friend of agriculture. We saw in the Budget papers another cut of 3.2 percent for 2017-2018 on top of the 2.5 percent cut in 2016-2017.

Whilst the Minister seemed to be in denial about this fact the figures are there in black and white, \$438.954 million in 2016-2017, and \$424.742 million for 2017-2018 down \$14.212 million. Likewise with staff numbers. The Minister refused to acknowledge that there had been a reduction in staff numbers from 2014-2015 to 2017-2018, fobbing of the question by saying the numbers were flexible.

When the Minister was questioned about the lack of detail in the SDS surrounding the office of Rural Economic Development, which forms part of the Minister's title, the Minister became quite heated, bordering on disrespectful.

When the Minister was questioned about how many jobs have been created under the Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance and how much funding has been allocated to the programme, the Minister delivered a long rambling response and was unable to answer the question satisfactorily.

Shadow Minister Dale Last asked the Director General What is the department doing to address the soaring electricity tariffs and the question was ruled out of order on the grounds that electricity costs did not fit within the portfolio. The Non-Government Members consider that electricity prices are having an enormous impact on all sectors of agriculture, from cane farming, cotton growing, horticulture, dairy and beef production and meat processing.

The question was allowed when it was pointed out that it was allowed under page four of the SDS and the Minister then gave an uninspiring and dismissive answer.

When it came to the sugar industry the Minister was asked if returned to government would the Labor government support the LNPs legislation that has been passed in the parliament, which will deliver a genuine marketing choice for growers.

The Ministers response would have left all canegrowers in no doubt that should Labor be successful at the next election they would once again be left to the mercy of large international millers such as Wilmar.

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In regard to a question on how many rural supply stores are selling 1080 baits which was an initiative introduced by the LNP government the Minister could not supply an answer and took the question on notice.

The response which was supplied by the Minister stated that Queensland Health issues the licences and DAF do not keep records of who is selling or purchasing wild dog baits. The lack of any records regarding this control method for wild dogs would seem to be nothing short of bazaar.

It is fair to say that at the end of this hearing it became apparent that once again agriculture is the poor cousin under this Labor government.

It is no wonder that both QFF and Agforce have described this Budget as underwhelming and outlines no clear vision for the agricultural industry.

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

With Estimates Hearing being held in the time immediately following the Premier being forced to remove a Minister while investigations were undertaken into whether that particular Minister had acted corruptly, it was timely for the Committee to discuss the contemporary governance and accountability frameworks surrounding the operations of the Department, and the potential misuse of email accounts bypass these processes.

The non-Government Members of the Committee note the Director-General was prepared to take on-notice a request for information pertaining to this matter – namely whether either the Director General or and Departmental Officers had ever been requested to send an email to either the Minister's private email address or the personal email of a Ministerial staffer.

The question was ruled out of order – despite the Director General indicating he was prepared to be open and accountable and furnish the Committee with a response – demonstrated to the Committee an obvious concern that the Minister's public account to date on the use of private email accounts may be potentially incomplete.

To his credit, the Minister displayed some mental nimbleness and flexibility when it came to questions surrounding his support of the Adani Coal Mining project.

Green voters and supporters across the State will no doubt be happy to hear that Labor fully supports the export of coal from Queensland to India as the resulting carbon emissions are not counted as a contribution to global warming here in Queensland – they are accounted for in India.

This policy position seems to have a bizarrely twisted seam of logic to it, and the Minister should be thanked for revealing how it is he justifies his support for on-going coal exports from Queensland.

The State Budget Papers show many Departments face dramatic reductions in their Budget over the 2017-18 financial year – namely Agriculture and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, while at the same time the Department of Environment received a 22% increase in funding.

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Accompanying this monetary increase the Department has factored in a 17% increase in staff levels from the 2016-17 Budget to the 2017-18 State Budget.

The question there raises itself as to how the Minister can justify a 17% staff increase in the face of the Treasurer's public statement that:

"Last year we introduced a new fiscal principle related to growing the government workforce in line with population growth, on average, over the forward estimates,"

Given population growth over the forward Estimates stands at 1.5%, and the Government has a 1.7% target to growth of the public service, it is therefore somewhat difficult for non-Government Committee members to believe the words of the Treasurer when we have a Minister with an approved increase in staffing levels at ten times the rate the Treasurer outlined.

Non-Government members were underwhelmed at the Minister's response to concerns about the potentially devastating impact of the spread of prickly acacia in the Channel Country. The non-Government Committee members believe the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Environment should be working together now in order to develop a comprehensive action plan to avert this potential environmental disaster.

The non-Government Committee members are concerned about the vague response given with regard to the rollout of the online booking service. Despite numerous attempts to ascertain when the project will be completed, the Committee was advised it remained a "work in progress".

Given Labor's track record in Queensland of bungling IT projects – who will ever forget the health payroll debacle – the non-Government Committee members would have appreciated the Minister providing more details as to: the timeframes around the contract and the project; what changes to the project scope have occurred and why; as well as if there has been any variance in the cost of the project delivery?

Another area of concern relates to the Budget allocated towards the tasks of pest and weed management. It was revealed the Budget allocated to the actual task of weed and pest management for the 2017-18 financial year will be the same as it was for the preceding financial year. At the same time however, the Department envisages a growth in amount of land area under protected status.

As a consequence, this can only mean the amount of money per hectare dedicated to ensuring the State remains a proper steward of these lands and a good neighbour is set to be reduced.

Apart from childish stunts, the Minister's denial about the big cuts, for pest and weed control in national parks, of 30 per cent to just \$5.9 million for 2017-18 was disappointing and hardly professional, when the SDS clearly shows that funding for this FY will amount to just 44 cents per hectare across the protected estate of 13.5 million ha.

The Minister's handling of questions was of a very low standard and his stunt of unrolling a large crocodile banner during the hearing was ill-conceived and time-wasting. Indeed a Labor member of the committee was equally unimpressed and asked that the banner be removed.

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Conclusion

The Palaszczuk Labor Government promised a jobs bonanza but gave Queensland a jobs crisis and a Budget con job. The details exposed in the Palaszczuk Labor Government budget proves that Queensland under Labor faces higher unemployment, higher costs of living, less projects started and delivered, and more and more job-stifling red tape.

Queensland is stagnating, the community is crying out for leadership and we have a government stuck in neutral. Labor's softly, softly approach is failing Queenslanders, doing nothing is not working and the economy is hurting. Families and businesses are paying more through higher taxes and increased living costs and much needed infrastructure across Queensland is not being built.

Instead of leading the way in job creation and job security, Queensland is falling behind the other states. Labor has failed to meet its own employment projections, meaning 80,000 less jobs will be created over the next three years. Youth unemployment is out of control and above 20 per cent in many parts of Queensland and up to 50% in the Outback.

Yours sincerely,

Pat Weir MP
Member for Condamine
Deputy Chair, Agriculture and Environment Committee

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