




Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT

Water Prices

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (2.07 pm): I stood in this chamber last May with some optimism that finally this government would stop treating our farmers as cash cows and start respecting and supporting them. Unfortunately, as regional Queenslanders have become all too accustomed to, this has not happened and in fact it has gotten worse. The release of the QCA's rural irrigation price review final report paints a dire picture for the future of water affordability and irrigation in this state. The final report handed to government has completely ignored the concerns of farmers and industry groups around the unsustainable cost increases associated with water prices for SunWater and Seqwater scheme customers.

Last year I toured Queensland meeting face to face with these farmers after initial water price increases looked bad. There was genuine and rightly placed concern over what their future held if prices were to increase year on year to reach what the government determines to be cost-reflective pricing. At the time the minister mocked the LNP and me for sitting down with farmers who were concerned about these prices. We were called 'scaremongers' and assured that these prices would not be in the final version. I say to the minister that we have the final version and the price increases are through the roof and completely unsustainable. None of the concerns the farmers and irrigators raised have been taken into account, like the minister and his government promised they would.

The Queensland Farmers' Federation CEO, Dr Georgina Davis, was very clear when she said that the final QCA report 'dismissed farmers' concerns' and 'provided little clarity for farmers who will be hardest hit by the price recommendations put forward'. Cost-reflective prices will see tariff groups like those in the Callide Valley face a fixed cost increase of 281 per cent, from \$18.50 per megalitre in 2019-20 to \$70.53 per megalitre in 2020-21. Water users in the Three Moon Creek groundwater tariff group would see a fixed cost increase of 116 per cent, from \$23.58 per megalitre to \$51 per megalitre. Make no mistake: if these price increases are brought in, there will be job losses.

There will be farmers going to the wall and there will be rural communities throughout this state that will crumble—communities like the small town of Giru in my electorate. Giru is home to a 13,568 megalitre aquifer that is used to supply irrigation water for canegrowers and, just as importantly, to stop rising groundwater drowning the community. For the last 30 years the Giru benefitted groundwater area has been subject to a scheme that actually stops 'rising groundwater affecting properties'. However, the QCA recommendations have ignored this by hiking the prices. Failing to acknowledge the unique circumstances facing Giru farmers, who will need to pay an additional 40 per cent for irrigation water over the next four years, is simply unacceptable.