



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

Federation Chamber

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Fairfax Electorate: Rural and Regional Services

SPEECH

Wednesday, 21 June 2017

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Wednesday, 21 June 2017	Source House
Page 116	Proof Yes
Questioner	Responder
Speaker O'Brien, Ted, MP	Question No.

Mr TED O'BRIEN (Fairfax) (10:16): While almost seven million Australians live outside large metropolitan areas, of the 20 federal electorates with the lowest household incomes in Australia, 18 are located outside our capital cities. We need real solutions to rural and regional unemployment for most regional centres. Country towns are no longer the robust, almost self-sufficient communities that they once were. Queensland is copping it harder than most. Western and northern Queensland are facing a jobs crisis with unemployment at 10.7 per cent in Townsville and over 12½ per cent in western Queensland, and with youth unemployment almost twice that. The problem in Queensland, of course, is that the Palaszczuk Labor government continues to display total neglect for the vast majority of rural and regional areas of the state and for the people who live there.

Under the strained leadership of Anastacia Palaszczuk and Jackie Trad, virtually all of Queensland beyond inner-city Brisbane was ignored in Labor's recent state budget. Unless you are a member of a Public Service union, one of the urban elite to have benefited from an additional 15,000 new Public Service jobs under Queensland Labor, you hardly rate a mention. There have been significant cuts to agriculture and fisheries. Meanwhile the environment department, based of course in the city of Brisbane, have seen their staff numbers balloon, thanks to a funding increase of almost 40 per cent over a two-year period. You would think that at a time when rural and regional areas are struggling they would invest in infrastructure, but the Palaszczuk government will stubbornly push ahead with their \$5.4 billion for only 10 kilometres of inner-city rail running across adjoining electorates held by Jackie Trad and Grace Grace, both of whom are under threat from the Greens. Meanwhile, the North Coast rail duplication plan is on hold. There is absolutely no money put aside to ensure that the rail line is duplicated up to the important regional town of Nambour. Nambour is a town of 17½ thousand people and, since the closure of the Morton Sugar Mill 10 years ago, the town has been struggling. With some downsizing at the hospital and also at the council chambers and with businesses closing, it needs a boost, yet the state Labor government refuses to fund the duplicated rail line. They are holding regional and rural areas in Queensland at ransom because they are threatened by the Greens in inner-city Brisbane. Meanwhile, the rest of Queensland seems to struggle as a result. It is about time they started caring for regional and rural areas.