



Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk receives a US navy guard of honour during her US trade tour.

QLD News

# Premier busy shoring up jobs in biofuel industry during US trade mission

Sarah Vogler, The Courier-Mail

June 23, 2017 7:00am

 Subscriber only

- [Qld sugar to be used in US cosmetics](#)
- [High petrol prices due to biofuel mandate](#)

PREMIER Anastacia Palaszczuk has travelled more than 11,000km to turn trash into treasure.

Or, more accurately, sugar cane and ordinary household waste into things such as fuel, plastics, cosmetics, perfume, vitamins and jobs. Permanent jobs. Sustainable jobs. Jobs in struggling regional centres battling high unemployment thanks to the waning resources boom.

The US trade mission, the Premier's third since gaining office after the January 2015 election, is heavily focused on establishing a multibillion-dollar biofutures industry. And it comes at a politically risky time for Palaszczuk.

Her first-term minority government handed down its final, pre-election Budget last week and the countdown is now on to election day.

That polling day is due early next year but could be called for any Saturday in coming months.



📷 Queensland sugarcane can be turned into things such as fuel and cosmetics. Picture: iStock

As her ministers fanned out across the state to sell the Budget this week, Palaszczuk chose to miss that crucial time and fly to the US west coast to reinforce relationships already forged with major companies, investors, political leaders and the US Navy looking to source millions of litres of biofuel from Queensland.

Flanked by a 100-strong delegation, including representatives from major Queensland universities such as QUT principle research fellow – and Queensland biofutures envoy – Professor Ian O’Hara, Palaszczuk has flown from San Diego to Reno and then to Los Angeles in the week-long trade mission to sell the state and to learn a thing or two from the US as well.

Over seven days Palaszczuk and her North America trade commissioner David Camerlengo have hosted lunches, breakfasts and evening receptions and held meetings with major biofutures companies.

The trip began with the Bio 2017 convention in San Diego, California, before moving to Nevada where Palaszczuk toured Elon Musk’s prized Tesla factory, inspected company Fulcrum Bioenergy’s waste-to-fuels plant and held an hour-long meeting with the Governor of Nevada, Brian Sandoval.



📷 Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk and Nevada Governor Brian Sandoval. The pair held an hour-long meeting in the US this week. Picture: Annette Dew

And it ended in LA with [meetings with major film and television firms](#), including Disney and Netflix. Attracting major productions to the state translates into jobs and multimillion-dollar injections into the economy.

But it is with biofutures that the Premier believes where the state's future lies.

A Deloitte, Access Economics report prepared for QUT on the economic impact of a bio refining industry in Queensland found it could generate an extra \$1.8 billion in gross domestic product and create more than 6600 jobs in regional Queensland.

“It is an industry that by its very nature creates jobs in regions where agricultural industry exists,” O’Hara says. “That’s clearly an area where there is high unemployment. And it’s an area where we do need to find ways to provide a good future for young people in those communities.”

O’Hara says the biofutures industry is not new to Queensland, with ethanol plants already established in Dalby and Sarina.



📷 CSR's distillery at Sarina, near Mackay in the state's north.

“What we are now looking to do is to really grow that industry quickly and to create a lot more similar refineries in other communities.

“We could compare it with, in the US, a state like Iowa where they now have 44 ethanol plants in a state with a population that's very similar to Queensland and a gross state product – total economy size – which is also very similar to Queensland.”

Those 44 plants combined employ tens of thousands of people.

“The US provides a great example of how you can grow an industry over a very short period and over the past decade there has been spectacular growth in the biofuels sector in the US,” O'Hara says.

“It provides a great example and it also connects us to the latest technology. So much technology development is happening in the US that we need to be here, we need to be on the ground engaging with companies and finding ways to attract those companies back to Queensland.”

Autoplay



ATO's Cranston resigns after fraud charges

1:10



I'm going to get us out of this mess:

UK PM

1:13



Gold Coast braces

Mum rejected by 500 job applications

The State Government launched a biofutures road map during last year's US trade mission and

has created a fund to help encourage businesses to move to the state.

Since then, the state has stolen a pilot plant from NSW – Southern Oil's northern oil plant in Gladstone – and several other projects are in development in areas including Mackay, Townsville, Ingham and the Tableland.

Palaszczuk says her government wants the world to know it is serious.

“When you talk about creating a new industry, you have got to have experience in doing it,” she says. “The new LNG industry that was created under the former Labor government demonstrates to everyone outside Queensland that, yes, we can start a new industry. That was a \$60 billion industry we created. When we talk about biofutures, there are so many aspects to it but the one thing that is central is that it is a great opportunity for regional Queensland.

“It’s real and it is happening. It’s not just biofuels.”



 An aerial view of test planting of sugar cane for a bioethanol project in northwest Queensland.

US company Amyris, which turns sugar cane into a product used in everything from perfume to high-end cosmetics and vitamins, this week committed to building a factory in regional Queensland and using it as its gateway to Asia.

“Now they have taken that next step, to partner with Queensland, you will see that upscale very quickly and we will be able to announce with them very shortly where that pilot plant will be happening,” Palaszczuk says.

“We have already had other cane producers contacted in the office saying ‘we’re interested’. It is very clear that US investors are very keen to invest in Queensland.

“There is nothing wrong with attracting industries and beating other states to get the jobs.

“If you set the favourable conditions, you can get the big investment.”

[Email Sarah Vogler](#)