



Speech by

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IMPACT OF NATURAL DISASTERS ON GRAIN GROWERS

Mr ELLIOTT (Cunningham—NPA) (11.55 p.m.): I take this opportunity to speak in support of grain growers from central Queensland right through down to the Queensland border who have suffered yet another massive body blow in the form of another natural disaster brought about by excessive wet conditions affecting wheat, barley and legume crops. Yellow spot in particular has caused problems for those wheat plants that were not already drowned in a lot of that country out west of Dalby where there are now melon holes. Much of that country was just purely and simply drowned. The wheat did not grow at all because of the water in the melon holes and on much of the flood plain as well. As I said, yellow spot caused these wheat plants to lose their ability to photosynthesise and, thus, the grain has not filled properly, causing a downgrading from high return classifications to feed and, in some cases, classified as unacceptable for sale at all.

Much the same fate due to disease has caused barley to be unsaleable and, of course, chickpeas and other legumes simply died due to waterlogging and disease. One asks: what does all that have to do with us? Unfortunately, the follow-on of this particular situation will be that the entire region right through central Queensland, the western downs and the downs to a lesser degree—certainly the southern and western downs—is probably going to see a reduction in returns, I would say, in excess of 70% on what would have been expected. In spite of it looking like being a very good year with good yields and people getting reasonable returns per acre, due to not only those factors that I have just outlined to honourable members but also the disastrous price for grain and legumes, we are seeing an unprecedented downturn in returns to the whole area. As we all know, that has a flow-on effect into all of the rural support towns and back to the regional centres such as Toowoomba, Rockhampton and all of the other bigger centres and, of course, that flows on here into Brisbane as well.

We are one of the most decentralised States in the Commonwealth—probably the most decentralised—and, as such, we are still very dependent on the incomes from those areas. Tonight I am here to call for support. I support the Opposition spokesman for Primary Industries, the Honourable Russell Cooper, and I also support the Minister for Primary Industries, the Honourable Henry Palaszczuk. I have already spoken to him about this matter. I know that he understands it and has had a good briefing in respect of it. He is very much aware of just what a disaster this all is. Not only does it flow through to all of those farmers and shopkeepers and into the towns but also it is having a devastating effect upon contractors and such people. I made a speech here some months ago in respect of those contractors who were affected by the floods. Seven flood peaks came through the border rivers. Many of those contractors who did laser levelling and worked on cotton farms did not turn a wheel for nearly seven months. Many of those same people also get involved in grain harvesting, carting and so on.

The whole rural community is taking a hit. I do not think I have seen much worse. Often when there is a drought the next crop is a good one because the country has been rested and it produces better crops. In this instance the country has been waterlogged and I do not believe a better crop will necessarily eventuate.

I call on my Federal counterparts for support. I support both the Minister and the shadow Minister in relation to this matter. This is a subject well beyond politics. We all have to work together to ensure that these people are supported with exceptional circumstances relief. I predict here and now that if that support is not forthcoming we will not believe the number of people who go broke. In the past decade these people have been faced with very difficult circumstances due to drought and various other problems.

Time expired.