



Speech by

**Mrs D. PRATT**

**MEMBER FOR BARAMBAH**

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Hansard 3 March 1999

#### ADDRESS IN REPLY

**Mrs PRATT** (Barambah—IND) (12.38 p.m.): I rise to speak in this Address in Reply debate and pledge my loyalty to the Queen and His Excellency, Governor Arnison. As the new Independent for Barambah, I wish to reinforce my desire, as previously stated, to represent all the members of the Barambah electorate regardless of political, religious or other beliefs.

Prior to the last election, Barambah was promised many possible projects. There was the extension to the Tarong Power Station and the possibility of a prison. The prison is something that the Yarraman people would dearly love to have whereas most other communities have spoken out against it. So that is the something that I would really like the Premier to consider. We still have one of the highest unemployment rates in the country. The Premier's statement that there has been a reduction in the numbers of unemployed is definitely not reflected in the Barambah electorate. We have had some tragedies over the past few months. I call them tragedies because nothing very much is happening in the Barambah electorate.

We have all heard of Cyclone Rona and the devastation that occurred in north Queensland. The electorate of Barambah suffered one of its greatest tragedies in living history in the recent devastating floods. The biggest tragedy, however, is that we have a Prime Minister and various Governments who do not demonstrate by their actions that they have confidence and pride in our primary producers. This is offensive to me and to many other Australians. We have a Prime Minister who willingly allows our pork industry to be sacrificed regardless of the fact that other countries put in place high tariff barriers and subsidies to protect their own industries. Where is our support? We have no support from our Government.

We also have the peanut industry in Barambah. Our State Ministers have decided not to support this industry. Instead of insisting that imported peanuts match Australian standards in cadmium levels, State Ministers want to raise the cadmium level so that other countries—

**Mr Palaszczuk:** What about Parliament?

**Mrs PRATT:** But the Minister should be fighting it. Inferior peanuts from other countries will be allowed to be imported along with the possible health risks that high levels of cadmium may bring. Why must Australian producers be the sacrificial lambs to other countries and their industries? Why can't our Governments believe in Australia? These are man-made tragedies that have inflicted much devastation on industries in the Barambah electorate.

As I said, my electorate has been visited by a natural disaster in the form of devastating floods from Kilcoy Shire at one end to Murgon Shire at the other. We are very grateful that we were fortunate not to lose any lives. As the rapidly rising water tore through the area it swept away livestock, fences and, most devastating of all, the hopes of all residents with the loss of crops.

I have never before seen crops laid flat as though they were a piece of vinyl. Crops of sorghum were weighted down by water to such an extent that any vinyl layer would have been proud of the result. Cotton crops were beginning to burst with brilliant white cotton bolls but are now stained with muddy water. The value of the crops has been downgraded to the extent that the cost of production may not be recovered. The crops were looking very promising and were to be the first step in lifting land-holders out of the devastating years of drought, pestilence and low prices for stock and produce.

The Government's questionable help in the form of low-interest loans offers little to the people of flooded areas. Most of these people have suffered losses for many years and have loans on loans. It would not matter how low was the interest on Government loans; the only loan that would help the victims of this tragedy is a no-interest loan.

With the true understanding of their plight and that of other victims of nature's onslaught, in true Aussie battler style the people of Barambah have begun to pull together as a team to work for the benefit of the community. In a very short time the people of Barambah have arranged a flood relief appeal and have put together a night of entertainment to raise funds for victims. The people of Barambah have shown their courage, their spirit and their belief in themselves. The news that there was to be a fundraising effort has resulted in many people offering their services and their talents free of charge for this vaudeville night. We have also received donations of goods and services for a celebrity auction.

Community is what we are all about. The community has responded to the needs of the less fortunate. In this day and age it is so common for people to take and take and keep on taking, but in all the towns in the electorate of Barambah we see an example of the true meaning of being an Aussie—giving people a fair go and standing by mates. In true Australian terms a mate is anyone who needs a helping hand.

This disaster is being recorded in a song. The song has been written by a local man named Scott Rowan.

**Mr Lucas:** Sing it for us.

**Mrs PRATT:** No way; I can't sing. Scott Rowan recently won the title of Songwriter of the Year. I have never been so proud to belong to a community. The effort in man-hours and dollar value cannot be calculated.

I would like to tell honourable members about a gentleman who spoke to me just before I came down to Brisbane. This man's words will be etched in my brain forever. He said—

"When the flood came, it was the last straw. I didn't even bother to go outside to see the damage. I had lost all hope of staying on the land. I was in utter despair. Then I heard of the support that was being rallied, and I cried. I think without it they would have found me swinging from a rope."

This man is in his seventies and has worked every hour that God has sent. He has been on the land all his life. How tragic that a man who has given his life to feed and clothe the people of this country should be reduced to the thought of swinging from a rope as his final act in life. The speed at which the community has come together to assist other members of the community is an example for all of us. This Parliament could ease a lot of concerns and solve a lot of issues for the people we represent if we followed the example of the people of Barambah.

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