



Speech by

JEFF SEENEY

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

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BURNETT REGION

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (6.11 p.m.): I rise to second the motion which has been moved by the Leader of the Opposition and which calls on the State Government to give immediate assistance to the embattled Burnett region. May I say at the outset that for me, as for all of the people of the Burnett region, this is a real issue. It is all right for the Premier to sit over there and laugh and joke and carry on with his silly play acting, but for a lot of people in the Burnett region this is real.

I represent a big proportion of the Burnett region, including the shires of Monto and Eidsvold in the North Burnett, Mundubbera, Gayndah and Biggenden in the Central Burnett and, following the recent redistribution, the shires of Murgon, Wondai and Kilkivan in the South Burnett. It is a region of small communities made up of small family-owned businesses and small family-owned land-holdings that are a legacy of the land settlement schemes of the early part of this century.

The Burnett region, because of its structure, has suffered more than most from the downturn in international commodity markets and it has suffered more than most from a series of drought years. The Burnett region has suffered more than most from the continuing decline in agricultural terms of trade as declining profitability for the region's agricultural industries has flowed through every sector of every community.

More importantly for this State Labor Government, the economic position of the Burnett region is currently being made considerably worse by a series of State Government policy decisions which have impacted on and are continuing to impact on the region's economic and social base. The most pressing area in which the State Government could make the most immediate impact is to provide immediate meaningful assistance to the South Burnett Meatworks. I and many other speakers have raised this issue many times in this Parliament. This cooperatively-owned enterprise constitutes a very significant part of the economic base of the whole region. The whole Burnett region will be further devastated by the loss of this plant, the loss of the secondary industry jobs and the loss of the \$4.5m that is owed to the region's cattle producers.

Tonight, I again call for some meaningful assistance for the South Burnett Meatworks. We do not need any more political game playing and doublespeak such as we have seen to date. We do not need any more laying of blame or discrediting of the plant or its management. Instead, this Government needs to put aside the politics and the economic rationalist theories of the academic elite. The Government needs to take a holistic view of the Burnett region and the effect that the demise of this plant will have on the people and the communities it encompasses.

Another industry where Government policy can have a very direct impact is forestry. The timber industry has been part of the economic base of the Burnett region for 100 years. Now at Wondai, Mundubbera, Eidsvold, Monto and Allies Creek sawmills are under threat from the ideologists who are currently driving the Regional Forestry Agreement process. The scientifically discredited ideology which would shut down the native forest timber industry takes no account at all of the social and economic effects on the people and the communities of the Burnett region.

I again call on the State Government to ensure that the Regional Forestry Agreement secures the future of the local timber mills in all the Burnett communities by ensuring that they have access to sufficient log supply from Crown native hardwood forests. Most importantly, decisions affecting the timber industry must be based on scientific fact and not emotive ideologies, and the professional and sustainable management of the forestry reserves to date must be recognised.

The use of irrigation has provided some welcome successes for some parts of the Burnett, with the development of new intensive agricultural industries such as grapes and other horticultural crops. There is a critical need throughout the Burnett for more water storage infrastructure to ensure future water supplies to both primary and secondary industry. Regrettably, the projects identified by the coalition in Government have all been put on hold while a seemingly endless series of studies to produce a water allocation management plan goes on and on.

It is critically important for the State Government to allow these industries to build on their successes. The long-term future of this area can be assured if the irrigation infrastructure is provided to ensure that a reliable supply of water is available. We all agree that that infrastructure needs to be built and managed in the most environmentally and economically careful manner, but at the end of the day it must be built to ensure an economic future for the small family-owned land-holdings and the small businesses that depend on those land-holdings throughout the Burnett area.

It is important to realise that this debate is about the future of people who are doing it tough. It is about the future of family businesses that are struggling to survive. It is about the future of communities that face an increasingly uncertain future. Too often those people, those families and those communities are forgotten in the pursuit of some narrow ideology.

The State Government has a moral obligation to play its role and contribute to a better future in the Burnett region, and it can do so only by resolving these and other issues in a sensible and compassionate way.

Time expired.
