



Speech by

Hon. R. WELFORD

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

Hansard 4 March 1999

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Locusts

Hon. R. J. WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage and Minister for Natural Resources) (10.02 a.m.), by leave: Over the past six months, this Government has acted promptly and effectively to prevent a locust plague in central Queensland, arguably the worst locust plague to confront Queensland crop farmers for more than a quarter of a century. This action has protected sorghum and other grain crops worth hundreds of millions of dollars to the Queensland economy. Export values of sorghum alone in Queensland amount to about \$84m every year.

The wet season in parts of rural Queensland provided ideal breeding conditions for locusts. Left unchecked, these migratory locusts can multiply rapidly. They can decimate sorghum and other summer crops and inflict severe damage to winter crops during autumn and spring.

My Department of Natural Resources, with the support of the Rural Lands Protection Board, local governments, land-holders and the Australian Plague Locust Commission, has been effective in preventing a locust plague emerging in central Queensland. Operations in the Clermont, Capella, Dysart, Emerald, Springsure and Rolleston areas involved up to four control teams, each comprising a survey helicopter, at least one spray plane and several departmental and local government officers.

Since operations commenced in November last year, in excess of 115,000 hectares of locust swarms have been treated to prevent large-scale crop damage and migration to other parts of the State. In addition, land-holders have treated numerous hopper bands—juvenile locusts—to reduce the potential for swarms to develop. Emphasis has been on plague prevention, not just plague control. Unless we have a prolonged dry spell, these locusts will continue to breed. Aerial operations are now targeting a third generation and further follow-up control of maturing locusts will be necessary.

During recent efforts, control operations were for the first time extended to one of the State's national parks. The decision was made to aeri ally control a large band of immature locusts over a small area of the Gemini Peaks section of the Peak Range National Park. This operation alone stopped a large-scale swarm developing that could have resulted in considerable crop damage as well as damage to vegetation within the national park itself.

I have personally inspected the locust situation and the continuation of the control program has my full support. The cooperative effort between my Department of Natural Resources, local governments, industry and local communities has already been very successful in preventing the development of an extensive plague.

The control program has protected crops, as I say, worth hundreds of millions of dollars at a time when rural communities are recovering from many years of drought. Given the potential for long-distance migration of locusts, the control program has indirectly reduced the threat to sugarcane, horticultural and other crops elsewhere in this State.

Initial operations commenced with the support of local government funding of some \$335,000 held by my Department of Natural Resources in the plague pest contingency fund. The Beattie Government has also contributed insecticide valued at \$300,000, together with an initial \$200,000 as part of matched funding arrangements for expenditure from the contingency fund.

Land-holders can be assured this Government will continue to support control measures and will take all necessary steps to combat the threat posed to the environment and the economy by locusts. We are protecting the environment and protecting jobs in rural Queensland. That is no clearer example that one can get of a can-do Government which focuses on solutions.
