



Speech by

Hon. R. WELFORD

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

Hansard 27 April 1999

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Locust Control Program

Hon. R. J. WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage and Minister for Natural Resources) (9.58 a.m.), by leave: I am pleased to inform the House that action by this Government has averted a major threat to this State's economic prosperity. I am pleased today to claim victory in the war in relation to the recent locust outbreak in central Queensland, which threatened sorghum and other crops valued at hundreds of millions of dollars.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr WELFORD: The Opposition may laugh, but it clearly does not care about rural Queensland. Prompt action by the Beattie Government—the instigation of aerial spraying of strategic swarms—combined with the efforts of land-holders and local government staff in spraying hopper bands with misting machines has contained this major outbreak. The success of these efforts demonstrates the benefits of a coordinated and cooperative approach to locust control.

The Government's prompt intervention resulted in the aerial treatment of 70,000 hectares during November and another 60,000 hectares during January and February. Operations were directed primarily at swarms in the Clermont, Capella, Dysart, Emerald, Springsure and Rolleston areas. Recent monitoring indicates that the March/April generation has resulted in less than 1,000 hectares of swarms, despite conditions favourable to the locusts.

We are delighted with the success of the control program, particularly at a time when rural communities are still recovering from many years of drought. Our objective was to prevent plague development, and we have achieved just that. The program has cost in excess of \$1m. However, it has averted crops worth hundreds of millions of dollars being destroyed. If the Government had not acted swiftly, up to 750,000 hectares of locust swarms would now be causing severe damage to central and southern Queensland's summer crops and threatening next month's winter plantings.

Staff from my Department of Natural Resources are also cooperating with the Australian Plague Locust Commission, local government and land-holders to ensure migratory locusts remain under control in the Meandarra area. Effective controls in this part of the State undertaken during recent months, coupled with favourable winter conditions, will limit the threat to crops during the next spring. Migratory locusts have the potential to multiply seven to tenfold with each of up to five generations during spring, summer and autumn. As our rural community is aware, they have the potential to migrate large distances and devastate valuable crops.

Our Government will take similar action in future to combat any threat to the viability of the State's cropping industries from migratory locust activity. With prompt action by Government and the support of industry, local government and the community, we have shown that these seasonal threats can be defeated.
