



Speech by

Hon. RUSSELL COOPER

MEMBER FOR CROWS NEST

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NATIONAL CROP INSURANCE SCHEME

Hon. T. R. COOPER (Crows Nest—NPA) (10.19 a.m.): Recently, two devastating hailstorms have demonstrated the need for the consideration of a national crop insurance scheme. Such a scheme must be affordable and must involve State and Federal Governments as well as growers and producers. Both storms—one at Stanthorpe on the Granite Belt and one on the downs between Pittsworth and Cecil Plains—cost the State and its producers some \$20m each in damage to fruit and vegetable crops on the Granite Belt and damage to cotton and wheat crops on the downs.

Insurance premiums are massive. It costs \$200,000 to insure a 1,500-acre cotton crop. Stamp duty at 8.5% is a staggering \$17,000. The Borbidge Government abolished this massive imposition on growers who were prepared to undertake their own risk management but were being penalised for doing so. The Beattie Government reinstated it. The Minister for Primary Industries, Mr Palaszczuk, knows that stamp duty is an imposition. What representations has he made to the Treasurer to have this iniquitous tax removed? In New South Wales, stamp duty is 2.5%. In Victoria, is it up to only 1%. We say that the Government should scrap the lot.

A national crop insurance scheme was first floated by the previous Federal Agriculture Minister, Mark Vaile, in January. Recently, I wrote to the new Minister, Warren Truss, for further details on what needs to be an affordable scheme nationwide so that all growers can be part of their own risk management. It makes sense, when every summer we experience severe climatic conditions, and this will always be the case. The belated support by Minister Palaszczuk for the scheme is noted. We request him to pressure his Government to make sure that we can get an affordable scheme.

In addition, the QRAA badly needs an overhaul. Whenever a natural disaster occurs all State Governments, past and present, have conveniently hidden behind the QRAA. The truth is that very few producers fit within the guidelines and, as such, few gain access to the low interest loans on offer. As a matter of urgency, the QRAA must be made more readily accessible, because more natural disasters are just around the corner and we owe it to our producers to look after them in their hour of need.
