



Speech by
**Hon. BRIAN
LITTLEPROUD**

MEMBER FOR WESTERN DOWNS

Hansard 5 October 2000

DROUGHT DECLARATIONS

Hon. B. G. LITTLEPROUD (Western Downs—NPA) (6.35 p.m.): I rise to support the original motion moved by the member for Hinchinbrook. The member for Hinchinbrook and the member for Callide have already catalogued the conditions in their particular parts of the State.

I want to start off by talking about the Chinchilla Shire, which the Minister spoke about a while ago, saying that another 120 properties have been declared. I have lived in the same area for nearly 60 years now and I can tell the House that after talking to my neighbours, who keep extensive records of rainfall, about their farming practices, I know that this is the first time ever in 47 years that one bloke has not taken his header out of the shed to harvest. In my opinion, these conditions are the worst I have ever seen there. I grew up on that land. The last good rains were in January. The only other effective rain was in June, and that was just enough to allow farmers to plant their cereal grains, but they have not started to grow. It is 100 days now since any rain fell at all—effective or not. The rainfall for the year to date is something less than 200 millimetres, but the annual average is 625.

So the reality is that there has been no growth of natural pastures since January, no growth of any winter pastures, no run-off of water into dams or creeks—that is rather critical at the moment—and there is absolutely no moisture in the topsoil or subsoil.

I want to chronicle the sorts of things that I have done in my electorate that are similar to what the member for Fitzroy was talking about. In late June/early July I talked to the DPI stock inspector in Dalby, Peter Oberhardt, and we discussed the deteriorating situation. He said that the committee had met and that the decision of the committee at that stage was that, even though pastures were drying off badly, the condition of the stock was still good and it was premature to go ahead with any sort of declarations. I agreed with that because I had been to the saleyards that day and I was aware of the condition of my own cattle and what things were like, although I had driven around the electorate and had seen that some people were in dire straits.

Then on approximately 20 August I again sought the same officer out. In fact, he was down in Brisbane and I talked to Peter Leggett, who is the other officer in the Dalby office. I said that I was going to start making some noises about asking for IDPs in the hope that the committees would crank up and I would get some support. That officer said to me, "Well, I have got to tell you, Brian, that we have to be guided by the drought declaration guidelines", and I just want to quote from them. On page 1 the guidelines state—

"To be eligible for a drought declaration the property under assessment must meet the 1 in 10 to 15 year rainfall deficiency criteria. The assessment compares actual recorded rainfall during the previous twelve months to historical data. The effectiveness of the rainfall is also considered."

On page 2 it continues—

"The following factors are taken into account when considering IDP applications and primary producers must be confident that their property will meet the criteria before lodging a formal Application for an IDP declaration:

(a) Rainfall. Amount and distribution of rainfall over the last 12 months."

The guidelines do not mention effectiveness. I think that the Minister ought to look at that.

That brings me to the chronicle I was talking about. The Minister will remember that I spoke to him in the sittings in August, when I was especially concerned about the dairy farmers on the downs. Deregulation of the industry occurred on 1 July, when they were right into drought, and I said that the guidelines now needed reviewing, especially for the dairy farmers. We both agreed with that and the Minister said that he would get on with that. I said, "I think that we need a review of the guidelines." We came back for the 5 September to 8 September sittings and we had a conversation about the situation. I can recall that and I asked, "What have we done about the review?" The Minister said, "Nothing, really"—

Mr Palaszczuk interjected.

Mr LITTLEPROUD: No, let me finish. The Minister said further, "But I have been talking to the DPI office and instructed it to be more flexible." That worries me, because I wonder whether that was an admission that that office had been too rigid in the way in which it applied it.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr LITTLEPROUD: As the member for Callide said, they were going for the 12-year factor rather than the effectiveness.

I now want to spend a little bit of time talking about the effectiveness of rainfall. People can get an effective rainfall of only 5 millimetres—20 points—if that occurs just after a farmer has planted grain into a moist paddock. However, effective rainfall is dependent upon how long it had been since the last rainfall and what the subsoil moisture is like. I would say that, in normal farming practice out my way, a fall of 20 millimetres—80 points of rain—is an effective rainfall. Anything less than that, especially if it has been a fair time since the last lot of rain, is not enough. Now we are in the situation in which people need at least 25 millimetres, maybe 75 millimetres—or three inches—of rain for it to have any impact. I am pleading with the Minister—and I have said this privately—that he look at the effectiveness of the rainfall criteria.

I am aware that in the past week the Minister had an interview with Ben Rees of Miles. Ben is a pretty cluey sort of a bloke. He insists that even the criteria upon which the department bases the rainfall is scientifically flawed.

Time expired.
