



Speech by

Mrs D. PRATT

MEMBER FOR BARAMBAH

Hansard 4 October 2000

DROUGHT; DAIRY INDUSTRY

Mrs PRATT (Barambah—IND) (11.09 p.m.): Drought and continuing predictions of no rainfall in the Barambah electorate are forcing land-holders and shire councils in increasing numbers to seek official declaration as a drought area. Some have been accepted and some have not. In relation to those that have not, we have to ask: why is that the case, when their properties are subject to conditions that have been described as the worst in 21 years and their properties are under the same conditions as the ones next door that have already been drought declared?

An applicant who lodged an IDP with the local stock inspector approximately three months ago still has not heard back and his cattle are dying. He asks why their concerns have not been addressed. Why are shires not being given drought declaration? No man or woman on the land has control over the floods or droughts that devastate their livestock and land, but they are watching their cattle die or they are having to put them down because of the lack of action by this Government. In a letter to me a fellow asks of the Primary Industries Minister, "What sort of person, what sort of Government are you?" Many people are asking the same thing.

On behalf of all the land-holders in the Barambah electorate who are seeking drought declaration, I ask that the Minister come out and see for himself the situation these land-holders are facing. He should come out and see for himself the severity of the drought. Livestock are dying, feed has become very scarce on the ground and very expensive to buy. When fodder is bought farmers have to pay GST—a further hardship and an added consideration in the final decision to keep or dispose of stock. For a farmer, selling breeding stock is no different from a shopkeeper selling the shelves, office equipment and other essentials—the very foundation of the business. As honourable members we have only to see one or two farmers sitting at our desks crying in order to realise the pain they are suffering.

Often it has been stated to farmers that they must be in a worst in 12 scenario. Nature does not wait 10 or 12 years and it is unrealistic to expect land-holders who suffered severely because of drought in the past few years to have to wait to see whether this time they are subject to even more severe conditions than previously. When things are bad, they are bad full stop, and many land-holders are subject to unrealistic conditions imposed by people who unknowingly make the wrong decisions.

Secondly, I wish to address the situation facing the dairy farmers in the Barambah electorate. Some of the biggest and best dairy farms in our area have closed. The impact of deregulation is well and truly being felt even by others on the fringes of the industry. This week a local milk vendor informed me that he could no longer afford to deliver milk because at the current price it was not viable for him to keep operating. The dairy industry has lost 240 Queensland dairy farmers since deregulation began, with a further 700 reportedly facing bankruptcy. Many other businesses and industries will feel the domino effect of this dairy industry decimation. The bottom line is that millions of dollars per year will be lost to the economy of areas when small dairies fade away and much larger ones in only a few areas throughout the State take over.

National Competition Policy, although still having some supporters in the halls of power, is starting to be questioned by former strong supporters. To the economists who have held sway in Canberra and who have ignored the limitations of NCP, the oft-quoted unintended consequences of NCP are rapidly becoming evident. Some of the biggest and best dairies in our area have closed.

National Foods has already stated that it will be cutting the price to its farmers from the end of December as a direct consequence of the price cutting actions of Woolworths. At present a viable dairy industry cannot be sustained. Although consumers are winning at the moment, it is essential that they realise that it is the farmers who are paying for the decrease in milk prices. It is obvious to everyone in rural communities that once the money drains out of these areas it never returns.

The Australian Milk Producers Association will be holding a nationwide protest on Tuesday, 10 October and every dairy farmer still in the industry, every dairy farmer who has left the industry and everyone opposed to NCP and its destructive effect on industries should endeavour to find the nearest protest site and be there. John Calvert, a local dairy farmer, took a gamble and became a processor and this very day was to see his brand, Same Day Fresh, come off the line. Many dairy farmers have stayed with the current processors, but one dairyman took the gamble.

Time expired.
