



Speech by

## Mr L. SPRINGBORG

MEMBER FOR WARWICK

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Hansard 5 October 2000

### DROUGHT DECLARATIONS

**Mr SPRINGBORG** (Warwick—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (6.10 p.m.): I second the motion moved by the honourable member for Hinchinbrook. This situation is absolutely desperate. I and a number of producer organisation representatives met with the Minister on 22 August and, I must say, received what I thought was quite a sympathetic hearing. At that meeting we outlined a number of issues and concerns for producers across southern inland Queensland, including the way the current drought relief assistance criteria were being applied in Queensland and the over-reliance upon 12-month historical rainfall data.

The Minister indicated quite firmly at the meeting his belief that local drought committees should be very involved in that process—something we all agree with. To give the Minister the benefit of the doubt, I suspect he was very genuine in that contention. However, I would like to say to the Minister that there have been, certainly across the southern inland part of Queensland, situations which prove that what he was contending and what has actually been happening out there are not meeting in the middle. That is, the drought committee representatives have not had their advice listened to in any substantive way.

I understand that in the case of Inglewood there was one meeting in early June. Notwithstanding that meeting of the committee, the responsible departmental officer is still very much of the opinion, to recent times—I am talking about up to this week—that the 12-month historical rainfall data was the issue they had to look at. In the case of Warwick and Stanthorpe there has been no meeting of the representative local drought committees.

**Mr Palaszczuk:** It is up to them to meet.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I have letters which show that they have been called on by local producer organisations to activate and they have not answered. That is the issue. The Minister says that the committees are out there making these representations and meeting, but who activates them? They are not activated and they are not out there working for the producers as they should be. That is the real concern. It is this stringent adherence to the 12-month rainfall criteria which has been the departmental officers' aversion to pulling together the committees and taking on board local information.

Maybe the situation is different in other areas, but I can tell the Minister that the people who are talking to me are talking very honestly about it. The real concern out there is that the rainfall data is very distorted. Let us look at the figures available from the Bureau of Meteorology. If we look at the six months to March this year we see that there was average rainfall. In the six months since then there has been below average rainfall. Further analysis gives a true indication. The Courier-Mail today shows that most of the rainfall fell between October and December of last year. Since that time these areas have received probably 10% or 20% of the rainfall they could expect in that nine-month period. Some people are saying, and the historical rainfall data available to individual properties shows, that they have had the worst rainfall since 1903. That is an absolute disaster.

The problem is that the guidelines set down for consideration of these applications are not being interpreted in the way they were supposed to be and in the way they were being interpreted in 1992 and subsequently. The issues of distribution of rainfall and effectiveness of rainfall should also be

considered. That has not been considered in my area. It is causing a lot of concern amongst those people.

**Mr Palaszczuk:** Your LDC in Warwick met on 14 July.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** The LDC in Warwick or in Inglewood?

**Mr Palaszczuk:** In Warwick.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** In that case, the communication between the organisations out there and the people in the Minister's department who are responsible for liaising with them is not working, because there are people and organisations writing to the committees, asking for activation and asking to be part of the process—we are talking about Agforce branches—and they are not being responded to. They are given phone numbers and addresses in other places. The representatives who are a part of it, in the case of the Agforce branch at Karara, have not been involved. I have documentation here to prove that. I am very happy to provide that information. There is a significant communication problem out there and it is causing a great degree of concern.

Notwithstanding meetings that are happening around the place, we have a situation where there is a stringent adherence to the rainfall criteria. Officers themselves are saying, "Don't bother applying for applications because with the 12-month rainfall data you haven't got a hope of actually getting it at this stage." Whether things have changed in the last week I am not sure, but that is what has been happening to date. People have been told that. Unless there is a far more compassionate approach to and consideration of those guidelines, we will see this disaster continue.

Time expired.

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