



Speech by

**Mr TIM MULHERIN**

**MEMBER FOR MACKAY**

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Hansard 5 October 2000

### **DROUGHT DECLARATIONS**

**Mr MULHERIN** (Mackay—ALP) (6.22 p.m.): I rise to second the amendment moved by the Minister for Primary Industries. Tonight we are again witnessing another shroud-waving exercise by the National Party members opposite. They are trying to recapture the ground they lost to One Nation at the last election. That is what this debate is all about. Let us look at the facts.

Industry supports the policy of self-reliance. Industry supported the 1992 policy. Industry supported the 1999 review of that policy. The coalition in Government supported the policy of self-reliance. When we say "self-reliance", what are we talking about? The 1992 Queensland drought policy entitled Drought: Managing for self-reliance details the concept of self-reliance. It says—

"Self-reliance fundamentally involves producers adopting management practices which reduce exposure to the risks associated with the complete range of business variables including climate.

It requires producers to accept the responsibility to prepare for and manage for periods of climate stress.

If the productive capacity of the farm is to be maintained in the long-term, decisions have to be made at the individual property level which take into account the particular characteristics of the enterprise and the conditions that apply in the region where the enterprise is located."

The policy also says about self-reliance that—

"Self-reliance as a strategy has wide acceptance in the rural community.

It is supported by the major industry groups within Queensland."

The Deputy Prime Minister—the National Party mate of those opposite—John Anderson, has said—

"National Drought Policy will see a transition from Government provision of drought relief assistance for farmer businesses, to incentives for drought preparedness, good resource management and more effective farm family welfare."

Mr Anderson also said—

"Farmers will hope to play an increasing role in achieving self-reliance and profitability of their businesses, whilst also ensuring the environment is protected."

The self-reliance initiatives undertaken by the Queensland Government include: improved climate forecasting and climate research with the establishment of the Queensland Centre for Climate Applications; development of climate management tools for agricultural production; farm financial counselling and support with property planning; support for enterprise diversification and business planning; FarmBis programs for training and skills; future profit and drought management workshops; and research into development of drought-resistant crops.

The latest Queensland Centre for Climate Applications forecast for the remaining three months is quite positive. According to the forecast, most of Queensland can at least expect up to a 70% chance of receiving above-average rainfall for the rest of the year. It is positive news for primary producers, but the real relief will only come when the rains start falling.

**Mr Cooper:** What is positive? Tell us.

**Mr MULHERIN:** "Positive" means we have rain. A number of members opposite have referred to the situation in the Warwick and Stanthorpe regions. I understand that the Warwick drought committee had a combined meeting with its Stanthorpe colleagues in July. I understand that to date within Stanthorpe and Warwick Shires only 35 individual droughted property applications have been received. The Karara branch of Agforce has recently requested that the committee should meet more frequently. The frequency of the meetings is determined by the number of IDP applications. I understand that the Warwick local drought committee will hold its next meeting on 18 October. IDP applications and conditions throughout the shire are expected to be assessed at that time.

The Minister and Agforce have urged primary producers affected by the very dry conditions to lodge an application for individual droughted property declarations. There have been no instructions given suggesting that primary producers not apply for IDP applications. It is unfair for the opposition to attack DPI stock inspectors—they are dedicated and hardworking public servants. In relation to drought assistance, DPI stock inspectors basically receive three types of inquiries regarding drought applications: the producer who wants to apply and is given application forms and an information booklet; the producer who wants to know what he or she may get out of the scheme—most are given application forms; and the producer who wants to know the criteria.

Let me repeat for the benefit of all members that the drought policy and guidelines for drought declarations have not changed. The policy now is the same as it was in 1992 and the same as it was under the Borbidge coalition Government. Those opposite had the opportunity when they were last in Government to change it, but they did not. They conformed with the national standard.

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