



Speech by

**Hon. S. ROBERTSON**

**MEMBER FOR STRETTON**

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Hansard 2 May 2001

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

**Rural Water Use Efficiency Program**

**Hon. S. ROBERTSON** (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Natural Resources and Minister for Mines) (10.07 a.m.), by leave: Water is a precious resource that affects everything we do as Queenslanders, whether it be in the home, on the land in primary production or turning the wheels of industry. Because water is such a finite resource, particularly in rural areas, it is essential that primary producers are encouraged to use water in the most cost-effective and efficient way possible. That is why in January the Premier launched the Queensland government's new \$14 million Rural Water Use Efficiency Program. This initiative is about helping farmers access the best technology available to get the most out of every drop of water available.

Under the program, financial assistance is available to primary producers through their industry organisations to purchase water equipment, technology and services to achieve best practice in irrigation water management. Individual primary producers can apply for subsidies of up to 75 per cent of the cost of equipment such as water meters, surge valves, soil monitoring equipment, weather stations, improved irrigation systems, and training and consultancies. The resultant efficiencies in water use will help irrigators increase productivity, produce a higher quality product and increase their yield, while reducing operating costs, water wastage and the impact on the environment. For example, up to 50 per cent of the water used in fruit and vegetable production can be saved, and the average savings for other areas and industries can range between 10 per cent and 50 per cent.

I am delighted to inform the House that the government's Rural Water Use Efficiency Program is proving to be an overwhelming success in rural Queensland. In the three months since the Premier's announcement, the government has received nearly 700 applications from primary producers to participate in the program. I recently had the pleasure of presenting a cheque in Mackay for \$1.34 million to Canegrowers Queensland, which represents the sugar industry's share of the \$3.5 million funding available this year under the program.

Other rural industries will benefit from the financial incentives. These include \$845,700 for producers in the fruit and vegetable industry, \$670,000 for the cotton industry and \$554,125 for dairy producers. These are the first instalments of a three-year program developed following extensive consultation with industry to determine the most cost-effective way for individual primary producers to improve irrigation management. This first year is a trial year for the Rural Water Use Efficiency Program, but the government will be looking at ways to broaden and improve the scheme in the following two years.

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