



Speech by

**Mrs D. PRATT**

**MEMBER FOR NANANGO**

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Hansard 1 August 2002

**APPROPRIATION BILLS [ESTIMATES COMMITTEE G]**

**Mrs PRATT** (Nanango—Ind) (3.48 p.m.): Although not part of the consideration of Estimates Committee G, rural areas and their future, and any threat to that future, are of great interest to me. I wish to take this opportunity to reinforce my concerns and those of my electorate on several issues. Both of these portfolios—Primary Industries and Rural Communities, and Tourism, Racing and Fair Trading—are the subject of concerns in my electorate, and current instances are relevant to not only these two ministers but also others and are interrelated.

The Minister for Primary Industries would be well aware that there are several threats to the future of rural areas in the form of drought, diseases and markets. Nobody could be unaware of the drought which is currently causing such havoc throughout Queensland. There are 36 shires that are currently totally drought declared and another 400 individual properties in 40 shires are partly drought declared. That is 76 out of 125. That alone tells the enormity of the problem. I recognise that Queensland still has—and is in fact the only state which has—maintained drought relief assistance, but I ask the minister not to make it too hard to obtain.

Unfortunately, drought is not the only problem. There is a very severe water shortage in the Nanango shire and many other shires in the Nanango electorate, particularly at Blackbutt where water shortages are becoming critical. It has been requested that a dam be considered on Cooyar Creek which would be of assistance to many of the very small towns in that area. The reliability of water is essential to ensuring the future growth of industries in these areas, and I would ask the minister to ensure that any negative effects of deregulation and NCP are offset by having enough water to take on new industries. I would also ask that the construction of the Paradise dam not impact adversely on water allocations in the South Burnett.

Although I realise that water comes under the Natural Resources portfolio, the Minister for Primary Industries must communicate across portfolios. Whether in rural towns or cities, it is essential that water is preserved. To that end, I would ask the minister to talk with the Local Government Minister to pursue the need to ensure that all new dwellings be instructed to install water storage facilities with enough capacity to support a family for a year. It is recognised that more than 95 per cent of water runs off through our drains or down our streets in urban areas. The preservation of water may limit local shire revenue, but this minister's job is to ensure the continuation of primary industries, and water preservation is essential to the long-term viability of rural communities and their industries.

Although the minister's desire to ensure the security of our shores from foot-and-mouth and other infectious diseases is commendable—in fact, essential—I ask the minister not to forget the tick eradication areas where graziers have put their money on the line and offer those in the protected and tick-free areas some security and give the legislation some real teeth. Cattle producers in the tick-free and protected areas do in fact suffer from the possibility of heavy losses when cattle are subjected to reinfestation. The minister would be aware that red water can inflict a very heavy penalty. At the community cabinet meeting held in Kingaroy the minister met with members from the Wondai, Kingaroy, Coolabunia, Moffatdale tick eradication committees, as well as representatives from other places, to discuss the importance of the tick situation. FMD and BSE are very important to keep out of Queensland, and I support any move to ensure that outcome. But we must not forget that tick eradication is also a major factor in protecting our beef export market.

I want to touch very briefly on racing in rural areas and the decline of picnic race meetings as more and more towns pull out for various reasons, with the threat of litigation being the main one. Blackbutt did not hold its picnic races for the first time, and this broke a long tradition. Many other picnic races are going the same way and there is a threat that picnic races at Linville will never be held again.

I ask the Minister for Tourism and Racing and Minister for Fair Trading to be aware of the worry and stress being placed on the elderly who live alone with the recent upsurge of door-to-door salesmen preying on them. I urge her to begin a campaign to inform the elderly once again of their rights, as they are easy prey to those unscrupulous persons who are often under pressure to make the required number of sales.

Although I am often informed that the elderly discuss their issues with their families, pride and independence often find these elderly citizens trapped into buying products they do not really want or need and are therefore saddled with a debt they can ill afford. I have had several people come to my office in the last fortnight with concerns over people preying on their families, families which have in fact been almost crippled with a debt that they can no longer afford to pay. These people are terrified that they will be taken to court and stripped of any assets they have. I thank both ministers for any help and assistance they have offered throughout the year. I invite both to come to the Nanango electorate to talk first-hand with residents about their concerns. That is something I would ask the ministers to take on as a regular occurrence. I know they are strapped for time, but rural areas feel that, to some degree, their concerns do not seem to be as relevant as many others.

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