



Speech by

**Hon. HENRY PALASZCZUK**

**MEMBER FOR INALA**

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Hansard 7 November 2002

### **MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

#### **Drought**

**Hon. H. PALASZCZUK** (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Rural Communities) (10.10 a.m.): I can advise the House that the number of shires on Queensland's drought declared list has increased to 50. I have received recommendations from local drought committees to drought declare Waroo and Booringa shires in south-west Queensland as well as Ipswich. The declarations of these shires, with the addition of Dalby Town local government area and existing part shires and individual properties, means that approximately one-third of the state is officially drought declared. There are another two part-declared shires—Tiara and Quilpie—and more than 300 individual properties that are also drought declared.

Under shire and individual property declarations, primary producers have access to freight subsidies on fodder and water, stock returning from agistment and on stock purchased for restocking. The Queensland government provides a range of drought assistance measures and support programs. The DPI has a number of senior extension officers responsible for providing drought recovery and rural adjustment advice to clients. DPI farm financial counsellors give producers assistance analysing their financial position and helping to develop and evaluate options for borrowing, purchasing and other management decisions. The Queensland government also offers hardship relief for lessees in the form of rent or instalments deferred for a 12-month period with interest and electricity tariff relief. In addition, borrowers from the government's Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority—QRAA—are being encouraged to seek an interest-only repayment option.

As the Premier indicated yesterday, the seasonal outlook for the coming months is not positive. Unfortunately, El Nino's grip remains firm and it is projected to do so until autumn next year. The latest American modelling shows that El Nino could continue for another year; in other words, we could be looking at a situation whereby the El Nino will not break until about April in 2004. However, the latest three-month forecast issued by the government's Queensland Centre of Climate Applications shows the probability of getting median rainfall remains comparatively low, with the Southern Oscillation Index—SOI—based on a consistently negative phase. However, this low probability does not mean that Queensland will miss out on all rain altogether.

According to QCCA director Dr Roger Stone, there is still a chance of getting some lighter falls of rain over summer, even though that rainfall will probably still not exceed the long-term average. I again encourage primary producers to closely monitor the forecasts issued by QCCA.

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