



Speech by

Hon. HENRY PALASZCZUK

MEMBER FOR INALA

Hansard 27 November 2002

DROUGHT

Hon. H. PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Rural Communities) (6.19 p.m.): I second the Premier's amendment to the motion. In doing so, I wish to address a number of the issues raised by honourable members opposite. Let me deal with the issue of small business assistance raised by the honourable member for Gregory. Small business assistance is available through the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority. This assistance is available for businesses in exceptional circumstances areas.

Prior to the last federal election, we had Ian Macfarlane, the Federal Minister for Small Business, saying that he wanted a federal scheme for small business during drought. Where is it? Where is the federal government's scheme? The Leader of the Opposition should be lobbying the federal government. The other issue raised was the cheap politicking by Warren Truss in relation to the Peak Downs area.

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr PALASZCZUK: The opposition supports Warren Truss. It said that for the Peak Downs area we had provided only \$12,000. That is not true. The figure is around \$300,000.

Members opposite also raised the point about QRAA charging the federal government to access exceptional circumstance applications. Listen to this, Mr Speaker. The federal government commissions state authorities such as the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority to administer exceptional circumstances on its behalf. The fee for this is determined by the Commonwealth Department of Finance. This was the case under coalition governments as well. Nothing has changed.

Let me now address the very important issue of exceptional circumstances, which was raised as the main issue by the member for Toowoomba South. As Minister for Primary Industries and Rural Communities, I have sat around the table with all other Australian agriculture ministers in trying to improve exceptional circumstances. On two occasions—in Hobart in May and in Sydney last month—all Australian governments have agreed to genuine exceptional circumstances reform. While we have agreed, there is only one jurisdiction that is not agreeing to the reforms, and that is the federal government.

Federal Agriculture Minister Warren Truss has refused to implement these reforms because he wants to reduce the federal government's share of exceptional circumstances funding. He wants to almost halve the federal government's contribution to exceptional circumstances business support. While states and territories financially contribute to EC, it is a Commonwealth program. Does the Leader of the Opposition understand that? Exceptional circumstances is a Commonwealth program that the states support to the tune of 10 per cent. No state or territory agrees with the federal government's plan to wind back its own funding for exceptional circumstances. Indeed, the National Farmers Federation has said that the federal government should pay every single cent for exceptional circumstances. The Leader of the Opposition should support the National Farmers Federation.

Let me detail the genuine exceptional circumstances reform measures that have been agreed to. The first is a new consultative application and assessment process including grants to regions to assist them to apply for exceptional circumstances assistance; the second is the ability to change EC boundaries in an area on NRAC's advice; third, in relation to buffer zones around EC application areas, the federal government wants only 10 per cent, whereas we want 25 per cent buffer zones; fourth, the assessment of completed formal EC pro forma applications within four weeks of the date of lodgment; and, fifth, farm business support to the tune of \$60,000.

We all agree to that. However, unfortunately the federal government is not supporting it. The four-week assessment period is particularly important. In 2001 the exceptional circumstances application for the Darling Downs took seven months to be processed. I will not go through all that again, because we know about that already. Deep down, I believe Warren Truss has taken this issue on exceptional circumstances too personally. He cannot see the greater good in exceptional circumstances reform. I feel that he cannot see beyond his ego, and that is a real shame. The mob opposite—eight National Party members—in here for this very important debate are aiding and abetting Warren Truss in not providing genuine reform to the people of Queensland in exceptional circumstances areas. Under the Howard government we have not had any reforms to our exceptional circumstances for one reason: Warren Truss's ego.

Time expired.
