



Speech by

HOWARD HOBBS

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

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WESTERN AND NORTHERN DARLING DOWNS

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (7.14 p.m.): Tonight I would like to inform members of the House of the serious situation that is facing people on the western and northern Darling Downs. For a long time now, those areas have not received rain of any consequence. Just recently, the Leader of the National Party, Mike Horan, the member for Darling Downs and I met with a number of farmers and other members of the community on a property at Chinchilla on the eastern side of that area. That area is good farming country, and they are good farmers. Some of them have won landcare awards for being innovative and practical. They are very sensible farmers. They have good equipment, but they just cannot grow a crop.

It is really quite extraordinary that, with all of those elements, those farmers just cannot grow a crop. Obviously something needs to be done. The present exceptional circumstances arrangement that encompasses that area is not good enough. It does not provide the assistance that is needed to get this area on the road to recovery.

A steering committee has been formed to look at two strategies. One relates to short-term assistance that will help the community—those people want to help themselves, but obviously they need government assistance to help them get over the line—and the other relates to long-term strategies for the region. As I said, the area that we visited is good farming country. I ask members to pause for a minute to think of what happens to those farmers who are on lesser country. Obviously, they are in big trouble.

This steering committee has met, and it plans to hold a further meeting on 5 March in Chinchilla, where they are hoping to get a lot of the community together to try to nail down some good strategies that will be of assistance to them in the future. Those people can be assisted in a number of ways. In the first instance, exceptional circumstances assistance or natural disaster assistance has to be boosted. We also have to put in place a strategy not unlike the south-west strategy and the desert uplands strategy to coordinate a group of people to provide the assistance that is needed to build up the farms in that area.

Time expired.
