



Speech by

HOWARD HOBBS

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

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DROUGHT

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (11.56 p.m.): The Beattie government's response to the current drought across much of Queensland is appalling. The task of compiling exceptional circumstances applications has fallen on producer groups such as Agforce for the Peak Downs application and the far south-west shires of Paroo, Bulloo, Quilpie, Barcoo, Diamantina and Balonne and local governments for the Burnett region. This starkly contrasts with New South Wales where the PP boards, or the rural lands protection boards, have produced four EC applications in the month of November which have been referred to the national advisory council for a full assessment. If the Queensland government would get off its hands and generate the EC applications, it would go a long way to easing the current drought burden on farmers and small businesses. There can be no argument that many primary producers are facing a drought which could, in my areas, meet the criteria of being a one-in-25-year or even a once-in-a-lifetime event.

Instead of offering solutions supporting and improving assistance schemes to ensure that the state government is responding to the needs of drought-stricken communities, the Beattie government has actually reduced its role and reduced its financial exposure. There are many people out there who I am sure would meet that criteria. For instance, in New South Wales Mr Truss put out a press release recently which said that he is satisfied that a prima facie case has been made for drought exceptional circumstances for the north-eastern section of the Northern New England Rural Lands Protection Board and the application has been referred to the national advisory council for a full assessment. So it can be done. However, I have some examples here from Alva Downs, Bruce Leach and Lyn Tongue from a property at Dulacca who put some records together. For instance, so far this year they have received 358.5 millimetres of rain. When one goes through the records that they provide—and they go way back to about 1890—from Dulacca and their properties there are really only two equivalent events in the last 40 years. Some other events are fairly close to it, but it gives the House some idea of the situation. In fact, there have been eight equivalent events in the last 112 years. We have a situation where these people are outside the area but I am sure that they could put a good case for being eligible for EC applications.

The government really needs to do more to try to help put together these applications and to give assistance, even if they are in smaller regions. They do not necessarily have to be huge areas to get applications through, particularly when they are bordering on existing regions already eligible for EC funding. There is one in the Western Downs area and we could easily add to that. There are many people who are facing severe hardship at the present moment. There is not the ability for organisations such as Agforce in particular to process those applications, even though it is working as hard as it possibly can to try to get those applications completed.

Time expired.