



Speech by

Hon. HENRY PALASZCZUK

MEMBER FOR INALA

Hansard 28 May 2003

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Drought Assistance

Hon. H. PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Rural Communities) (10.08 a.m.): I have previously warned of the dangers of prematurely declaring an end to the drought. Whilst a final prognosis on El Nino is due from the government's Queensland Centre for Climate Applications within days, I want to again caution against calling an end to the drought. The fact is that a break in El Nino will not be immediately followed by rain. Some areas have received good falls and winter crops are to be planted in areas left fallow due to drought for two or more seasons. Just as the drought continues for many producers, so does the provision of assistance from the state government. In the last four weeks more than \$1.2 million was provided in subsidies under the Drought Relief Assistance Scheme. So far this year, \$4.8 million has been paid under DRAS.

The government's drought declarations continue to cover the 89 shires and six part shires on the advice of local drought committees. In addition, the recently announced new drought assistance measures in the form of drought carry-on finance and drought recovery loans have generated a lot of inquiries from producers. Already \$1.4 million has been approved under these schemes, and I am advised by the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority that the current level of demand is at the rate of approximately 25 to 30 applications per fortnight. Based on this level of applications and the current approval rate, it could be expected that assistance under these programs may increase to approximately \$1 million per fortnight in approvals.

These schemes aim to help producers manage through the drought and then plan a strong recovery. As a government, we attuned these programs to what was available in the form of exceptional circumstances interest rate subsidies, which are funded by the Commonwealth and the states. In reference to exceptional circumstances, I would like to put on the record my disappointment at recent decisions from federal Agriculture Minister Warren Truss. Firstly, he has mistreated the horticulture industry in determining EC declarations. Fruit and vegetable growers have been deprived of assistance. Secondly, he rejected the application for EC on the Granite Belt in the electorate of the Leader of the Opposition. And on Friday, he has again created two classes of drought affected farmers in central Queensland and the state's south-east with a number of producers excluded based on what they produced. Essentially, Warren Truss told them that if they did not have livestock or broadacre crops they were not suffering enough.

The Queensland government and industry have worked hard to produce these detailed and comprehensive EC applications. To get nonsense decisions like we have on the last three applications is disappointing. I want to say this to those producers who have been denied assistance by the federal government this time around: as a government, we will continue to fight on their behalf. Finally, we know that our primary producers are doing it tough and we want to ensure they access the assistance to which they are entitled.