



Speech by

Hon. HENRY PALASZCZUK

MEMBER FOR INALA

Hansard 30 October 2003

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Exceptional Circumstances Scheme

Hon. H. PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Rural Communities) (10.14 a.m.): In replying to a question about the National Party's Telstra sell-out yesterday, the member for Gregory interjected. He said—

Tell us about ECs, Henry.

'ECs' stands for the federal government's exceptional circumstances program offering aid to farmers affected by a severe event such as a drought.

Mr Hobbs: Tell us about the money, Henry.

Mr PALASZCZUK: I accept the member for Gregory's invitation and I will start with his electorate; I will get on to yours after that.

Last month the Queensland government and industry submitted an EC application for producers in the shires of Tambo, Blackall, Jericho, Barcaldine, Ilfracombe and the parts of Longreach shire.

Mr Seeney: Agforce did the application. Your department wouldn't do the application.

Mr PALASZCZUK: Come to my office after question time and have a look at the application.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr PALASZCZUK: I am genuinely—

Mr Seeney: You're going to stand there and take the credit for what Agforce did.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Member for Callide!

Mr PALASZCZUK: I am genuinely offering the honourable member the opportunity to have a look at the application in my office after question time—okay? You're on.

Last year the federal government implemented a new rule to ensure that producers accessed interim assistance whilst the case was being assessed by the National Rural Advisory Council. It was called prima facie EC. Federal Agriculture Minister Warren Truss announced this change on 19 September last year when he said—

The Federal Government has decided to provide welfare assistance under the EC program for six months as soon as the National Rural Advisory Council (NRAC) is asked to examine an application.

With this in mind, I was disappointed to hear that NRAC is already preparing to visit the central mid-west region, yet Mr Truss has not announced assistance. There is a similar delay for the producers in Whitsunday, Sarina and Mirani shires and Mackay city. NRAC arrived in that region yesterday and it will continue its assessments today, but Mr Truss has not made prima facie assistance available.

Let us get back to western Queensland. Last week Mr Truss knocked back the Ashy Downs application without even getting the advice of NRAC. Ashy Downs covers the producers in Aramac shire and parts of Flinders, Richmond, McKinlay, Cloncurry and Winton shires with a 20-kilometre buffer zone. In rejecting the application, Mr Truss suggested adding Aramac shire to the central mid-west application. We have done that, but we will not give up on the other producers we and Agforce sought EC assistance for.

This is the area of the Leader of the Opposition. Another serious anomaly is the requirement for perennial horticulture producers to prove at least 25 per cent of their trees have died to access assistance. This rule was introduced for the Burnett and upper Brisbane Valley application.

Mr Seeney: It's been fixed.

Mr PALASZCZUK: As the member says, it has been fixed, but it has been fixed for the people in the Granite Belt last week. The Truss tree crop rule is ridiculous, and no producer should have to meet it.

Today I am seeking assistance for dairy and pork producers denied eligibility for assistance in previous EC applications—your electorate now! The applications are for 30 pork producers in the Banana, Thuringowa, Mareeba, Maryborough, Isis, Mount Morgan, Hinchinbrook, Calliope, Dalrymple and Burnett shires and for 24 dairy producers—that is what it has got down to—in Banana, Calliope, Miriam Vale and Burnett shires.

Warren Truss is due to address the National Party Central Council meeting in Brisbane at 10 a.m. on Sunday. I will be interested if any of the members opposite interject on him and say, 'Tell us about ECs, Warren.'