



Speech by

HOWARD HOBBS

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

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NATURAL DISASTER RELIEF, TAMBO SHIRE

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (7.23 p.m.): I wish to report to the House on the declaration of natural disaster relief arrangements in the Tambo shire last week. Australia has a harsh climate and our primary producers do a magnificent job to survive and produce products for our domestic and export markets. Primary producers want to be self-sufficient and do not want to receive government assistance unless it is absolutely necessary. All Australians have become aware of the significant economic impact of the drought on our economy, with less than satisfactory terms of trade figures. Governments, however, need to be responsive when an industry or area is in trouble or there will be a slow economic and community recovery after an event.

In the instance of the Tambo natural disaster event a satisfactory outcome was achieved. However, some obstacles delayed a more timely natural disaster declaration. It became evident that an extraordinary event was developing by Monday, 9 February when six to eight inches of rain had fallen and by noon other areas of the district that had missed out on the earlier heavy rain had received a deluge of two to five inches on top of the previous six to eight inches that had fallen on the region. The district had been in severe drought and all livestock were in poor condition and were being supplementary fed in some way. It was clear that livestock that were being fed every two or three days would not get fed for several more days due to the extreme conditions and had already gone without feed for several days previously and would soon die due to the boggy and cold conditions unless fodder could be got to them.

I contacted the local coordinator of emergency services, Scott Walsh, at Roma to alert them to the situation. He was most helpful and advised that the process was for the local council to request a state natural disaster coordinator—the district police inspector in Charleville—to assess and declare the event. The Tambo Shire Council requested declaration of a natural disaster event so that fodder drops could be carried out. All systems were working well and the district police inspector, Tony Rann, had been alerted to the situation in the first instance by the emergency services officer, Mr Walsh, and the Mayor of the Tambo Shire, Councillor Dougal Davidson, and CEO Ken Timms were responding to the needs of their shire.

The trouble started when I was advised that the fodder drops were no longer in the natural disaster relief plan and maybe DPI could help. I could immediately feel the cold hand of bureaucracy and knew well that we were in trouble and livestock would die. I rang the Director-General of DPI, Dr Warren Hoey, who was at a meeting. Mr Tony Rayner, District Manager, Longreach, responded and he was very helpful. However, it was clear that there was no process in place for the DPI to take over fodder drops. It was becoming clear that other avenues had to be pursued and late that night I was able to contact the federal member, Bruce Scott, who was able to make contact with the Ministry of Defence. We were advised to make application for assistance, which was done by Mayor Davidson first thing the next morning, Tuesday, 10 February. I understand that we could not get military assistance until we had an official disaster event. However, we could not get a declaration because it did not involve humanity, and the value of assets damaged or something like that did not quite meet the criteria. Dr Hoey quickly got on the job—

Time expired.