



Speech by

**HOWARD HOBBS**

**MEMBER FOR WARREGO**

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**WESTERN DOWNS SOLUTION GROUP**

**Mr HOBBS** (Warrego—NPA) (7.14 p.m.): Tonight I want to talk about the Western Downs Solution Group, a group comprising people from the Tara, Chinchilla, Wambo and Murilla shires. This is a drought declared and exceptional circumstances area. They wanted to revive their own region. They set up the Western Downs Solution Group on 5 March last year. They have done a lot of work since then. There have been numerous meetings and lots of discussions with various government people. They have done a lot of soul searching themselves.

I will give members some idea of what has happened in that area. It is a top farming area. The drought has been so bad in the area. The figures are that the area has had 100 inches below its average rainfall for the last 10 years. Even the best farmers have had great difficulty in being able to make ends meet. It has been a difficult time for them. However, it is opportunity for them to reform and improve the viability of their region, diversify and value add.

The federal government has put in place a program called the Agricultural Development Program worth \$26 million. This group made an application for some funding from this program. They were able to get \$3 million. The issue is that the state government also has to make a contribution of \$3 million. There obviously has been a real problem with that. We have had lots of discussions with the Minister for Primary Industries and his staff. They have been cooperative in one sense but they have not been able to provide the funding that is needed. They have given some examination funding from a \$150,000 program to look at long-term solutions. The DPI provided \$25,000.

It is not enough. We have to get that program up and running. The problem we have is that if we do not use this federal government money we will lose it in the next budget. I encourage the state government to help. Just a while ago we were debating a bill in the House relating to the sugar industry that will cost the state government \$150 million. These people want to do it themselves. Some \$3 million over a number of years would be very good value. These people want and can do it themselves. They can restructure their own region. I ask the government to give this all the support they can.