



Speech by

# Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard Wednesday, 7 June 2006

---

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### Drought

**Hon. PD BEATTIE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier) (9.44 am): Let us move on and talk about other things. We have had enough nonsense from those opposite. The worst drought in 100 years is having a severe impact on many parts of our state and many aspects of our lives. In terms of primary production, more than 60 per cent of the state is now officially drought declared and people are eligible for assistance. I table the latest drought declaration map produced by the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries.

This is quite alarming. If members look at the area of drought they will see that Queensland is more affected than any other part of Australia. We can see just how much of Queensland is affected by drought. If we compare our state to the rest of Australia we can see that we are the worst affected state in Australia when it comes to drought. There are some areas of New South Wales, but largely Queensland, a little bit of the Northern Territory and New South Wales are the ones worst affected.

We are working with affected rural communities to help where we can as the severity of this drought extends. Exceptional circumstances assistance is currently available to producers in 56.3 per cent of the state. That percentage is constantly reviewed as the drought deepens. Assistance is available to exceptional circumstances declared areas for a period of two years and then reviewed by the Australian government. Assistance to producers in declared areas is available through access to healthcare cards, income support funded by the Commonwealth government and farm business support in the form of interest subsidies on existing loans funded by both the Commonwealth and Queensland governments.

The state government also provides assistance to small business in exceptional circumstances areas, impacted directly by the event, in the form of interest subsidies. Exceptional circumstances business support expenditure in Queensland by the Queensland and Commonwealth governments has amounted for Australian and state governments since 2001 to \$144 million in interest subsidies.

Queensland farmers are not alone in their struggle. Earlier this week it was revealed that 70 per cent of Australians are now subject to water restrictions. The way that we use water and how we conserve it is changing right across the continent. This Bureau of Meteorology map shows in red and pink the parts of Australia where rainfall has been below average to the lowest on record as a result of climate change.

As honourable members can see, large tracts of this red and pink coloured country is in Queensland. We are suffering an enormous rainfall deficit. The rainfall we could have normally expected has not fallen. The in-flows into our dams and major water storages in the state's south-east have been severely reduced or negligible. For example, the region's largest dam, the Wivenhoe Dam, was at 60 per cent of capacity, or double what it is today, just two years ago.

We are doing a number of things to assist the bush in terms of water provision. I seek leave to have those details incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

The Blueprint for the Bush has identified \$990 million in water infrastructure projects.

A regional water supply strategy is well-advanced for central Queensland, planning is underway for far north Queensland and other strategies planned for the Wide Bay-Burnett and Mackay-Whitsunday regions.

Mr Speaker, the Government's Queensland Water Efficiency Taskforce is assisting rural and urban communities and councils to improve their water management and drought contingencies.

We are working with councils and water service providers to prepare drought management plans.

These plans must state when restrictions or other actions will be taken and what these actions are.

For residents of communities—whether they have 50 people, 50,000 or 500,000, it means greater water security.

*Tabled paper:* Map showing Queensland drought situation as at 15 May 2006 and map by Bureau of Meteorology showing Australian rainfall deciles 1 June 2004 to 31 May 2006.