



Speech by
Ray Hopper

MEMBER FOR DARLING DOWNS

Hansard Tuesday, 28 November 2006

WATER CHARGES

Mr HOPPER (Darling Downs—NPA) (10.15 pm): I wish to bring to the attention of the House my intention to call on the Minister for Natural Resources and Water to extend drought relief in respect of water charges and low water availability for all Queensland farmers affected by the ongoing drought. I have recently been approached by a constituent of mine who currently pays \$2,738 every three months to SunWater but has received no water for the past three years.

I have also been advised by my constituent that she has received verbal advice from SunWater stating that they can obtain their water allocation via their bore due to the fact that there is no water available through their allocated SunWater source. This may sound like a logical solution. However, my constituent pays around \$9,000 per quarter in electricity costs through Ergon Energy to pump this water from their bore. I understand that SunWater has put in place a hardship policy which enables customers to seek relief from charges. However, this policy only allows the customer to defer the payment for two months, which means they are expected to pay for two quarters within a four-week period, as the second charge would still fall on its original due date.

Another aspect of the drought that I would like to raise is with respect to water licences. I have previously made numerous representations to the various ministers—four in the last 12 months—on behalf of my constituents who believe that they are unjustly being charged for licence renewals even though there is no water available, and this has been the case for at least five years for the majority of farmers. Why should they be paying for a licence for something that is not available? After all, any wise consumer does not pay for an item and not take possession of it. As the old saying goes: you pay for what you get. However, this is not the case with the Queensland government.

I call on the minister to defer all licence fees until the end of the drought. I understand that Victorian irrigators have been granted immediate relief via a \$5,000 rebate on rural water bills where the allocation of water is less than 50 per cent, and irrigators whose water bill is more than \$5,000 will be able to defer the remainder of the payment for up to five years interest free. Good on the Victorians! This rebate will cover water bills for 75 per cent of irrigators. I have also been informed that the New South Wales state government has announced a package of new drought measures of \$250 million, as well as a \$30 million emergency relief package for families on the brink. This package will grant farmers much needed extra drought relief, including waiving of water fees and a range of levies that will be deferred until they get back on their feet.

I am seeking the minister's urgent consideration of matching and or adopting the Victorian and New South Wales drought relief policies for all Queensland farmers affected by the drought. Unfortunately for Queenslanders, the government's drought measures have provided no new money for small business; no new support for families; no waiving of fees for irrigators who are receiving little or no water allocations; no waiving of any fees; and, finally, no tax relief. I believe that it is time for the state government to get serious about helping those in genuine need to enable our farmers to overcome this horrific drought.

SunWater is milking our farmers dry. It is charging us and no water is being provided.