



Speech by

**Liz Cunningham**

**MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE**

Hansard Wednesday, 22 August 2007

---

## **NATURAL RESOURCES AND WATER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT REGULATION (NO. 1) 2007**

**Mrs CUNNINGHAM** (Gladstone—Ind) (8.05 pm): I rise to speak in support of this disallowance motion. I think it is an indictment on this chamber that we are even having to debate it. The south-east corner experienced some rain in the last couple of days, but it has occurred after level 5 water restrictions have been brought in. Those level 5 water restrictions are for domestic water users. So people have to shorten their showers and not water the garden as much as they used to. They cannot hose down the cement and they cannot wash their cars. People in the south-east corner have felt the effects of drought.

I ask members to compare that situation to that of farmers who have had to reduce their herd to only the barest of breeding numbers. They have had to sell cattle in a depressed market. As the member for Gregory said, they have had their wife and children out handfeeding cattle—if, indeed, they can afford to purchase feed. Yet those people are getting this sort of a response from the government. Those people do not just not wash their car; in some circumstances they have to stand by and watch their stock deteriorate and in some cases die.

The use of the stock routes has been historic. I think all of us who represent rural areas can look back at designated stock routes as a historic part of the make-up of our electorates. They were put there for droving purposes. Some of the stock routes have been closed, particularly as urban areas have encroached further onto rural land. But for other areas in rural and regional Queensland, the stock routes are an integral part, not so much nowadays of moving stock but of grazing stock in the dry. Those stock routes have to be maintained. They need to be maintained for our primary production, our primary industry.

It is ironic that the department is charging our farmers 83c per head for grown cattle and 10c per head for calves at a time when probably the stock routes would be carrying a very dry fuel load. In fact, by putting cattle on the stock routes the farmers are doing the government a favour in terms of fire control. I have no doubt that most of the farmers have to supplement the stock route feed with licks et cetera because it would be very dry and nutrient poor. But it gives the cattle some bulk.

I think we need to go back to that period when governments recognised the cooperation between urban and rural areas, the interdependence between the city and the country, and recognise that it is time to show some compassion and understanding for our families in rural and regional Queensland. It is not an easy thing to have cattle grazing stock routes. It takes a high degree of vigilance to ensure the integrity of the herd and to protect road users as much as that is possible. I can say that no farmer who has to resort to grazing their cattle on stock routes would find it an easy task to undertake.

I think it is disappointing that we are debating this motion. I think it shows a callous indifference towards our rural cousins, if you like, and I do not believe that is a characteristic that the minister demonstrates in his normal day-to-day activities. After all, it is up to the minister to make a call on this. It is possible for him to change the direction that the department is taking. At a time of greatest need, in this

instance the government is sinking the boot in and that is not something that rural and regional Queenslanders will forget.

The issue of water harvesting charges involves a fair trading principle. If a store tried to sell something that either did not meet its description or was not available, it would be charged under fair trading principles. The store would be required to provide the product for the money that the customer has agreed to spend or refuse to take the money.

The government is asking farmers to pay for a product—that is, a water licence—even though it is not supplying that product. Perhaps one option is a two-tiered water charge where there is a small charge for the installation of the measuring system and another charge for the water component as occurs in urban water supply. Farmers are asked to pay for a product that cannot be supplied by the department that is charging them. In every other circumstance the Minister for Fair Trading would be down on such a supplier like a ton of wet cement and would have them before the courts. Therefore, I ask the minister to apply the same principles here. If he cannot supply the product, he should not charge the fee. I ask him to be fair and reasonable with those people.

I know people in my electorate who are being charged for a water licence even though they have not pumped for three or four years. They are paying the charge because, if we do get some good seasons, they want to keep their licence allocation so that they can pump from that water source. However, it is no less annoying or frustrating for them to have to pay a charge when they are not getting a product. As I said, in every other circumstance that would be not tolerated by governments.

I ask the minister to reconsider the charges on the stock routes. For decades our country friends and relatives have invested in the economy of this state and now they are crying out for some consideration from government. They are asking to put cattle on what is effectively dry grass. As I said, and I do not say it lightly, they are doing the government a favour in terms of fire management, weed control and pest control. If the load is reduced, the ability for weeds and pests to proliferate is reduced. Obviously they are not asking to be paid for doing that favour.

They are asking—and asking stridently—the minister to remember that they are in the throes of one of the worst droughts that this nation has ever seen. Financially they are very strained and that is evidenced by the incidence of self-harm and family implosion in rural and regional Queensland. They are asking that this impost in terms of government revenue be removed to give them a glimmer of hope and a glimmer of support from a government that it could be said does not care for the bush.