



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

Hansard Wednesday, 22 August 2007

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

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (8.53 pm): The member for Darling Downs has moved that the Natural Resources and Water Legislation Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2007 be disallowed to prevent further financial disadvantage being placed on primary producers. The motion moved by the member for Darling Downs calls on the government to reduce the minimum fee that councils must charge graziers to use stock routes during times of drought. The disallowance motion is not requesting the removal of all fees but rather seeking to give councils the option to waive the fees if they consider it necessary because of financial hardship.

Local councils are well aware of the economic advantages of looking after landowners in times of drought. The grazing industry provides a great boost to local economies in good times. The rural areas ride on the back of the beef industry. I know that over 40,000 cattle go through the saleyard in Charters Towers each year. That provides considerable wealth to the region.

We could actually afford to lose the mining industry which was not there for over 70 years and possibly the tourism industry but not the beef industry. Places like Charters Towers, Hughenden, Richmond, Alpha and Muttaborra rely on the beef industry. It provides economic wealth for those towns. As I was saying, we see 40,000 cattle go through the saleyards in Charters Towers. It provides jobs for council workers and railway employees who pick up the cattle. The motels are often at capacity. It provides work for the engineering works and produce producers. This is the case for all rural areas. It is important that we look after the rural industries and the rural people and landowners given the considerable wealth they generate for the economy.

The last thing we want to see is those rural industries destroyed and everyone moving to the south-east. We have seen the catastrophe in the south-east because of a lack of planning. We need planning to ensure that landowners are looked after so that they can generate the wealth and maintain the economies of our local rural communities.

The use of stock routes as an alternative agistment option in drought conditions provides relief to farmers and the chance to strengthen weak cattle prior to their transportation to other parts of the state that can provide agistment and keep the cattle alive. General maintenance costs of the stock route networks and the cost associated with issuing permits are the responsibility of local councils as is the daily management of the network. As well as maintenance and administration local councils bear the financial cost of new infrastructure. In other words, stock routes across the state are subsidised heavily by local councils and yet they remain the property of the state. In times of hardship, however, it is the local councils who are prepared to forgo fees for the benefit of locals while the state government continues to try to suck blood from a stone.

The disallowance motion would give local councils the capacity to waive fees if they consider it necessary because of financial hardship being experienced in times of drought. It endeavours to eliminate the portion of the financial burden and personal distress faced by rural people in unfavourable and extreme weather conditions. Considering the contribution to the state's economy by primary producers—I believe it

is around \$10 billion to \$14 billion—more should be done to assist them and the local councils who support them.

This government desperately needs to support this motion and turn from its antirural position that it has taken over the years where it continues to gut rural communities and rural people. The Premier said on the ABC that many rural people will never vote for them therefore Rudd's chances will not be affected during the next election. This is a chance for the government to redeem itself and vote to support rural people and understand rural issues.

We can understand why rural people will not vote for those opposite. They have introduced legislation like wild rivers, introduced the spy in the sky satellites and the dob-in-the-farmer hotlines, they have allowed the extreme left-wing greenies to infiltrate the Environment Protection Agency and they have introduced the Vegetation Management Act. Year after year they have introduced policies that blind Freddie can see are antirural policies.

Vegetation management is another one. Land management is about sowing the good seed and producing the best crops and, in the end, putting the best food on our tables. This is about giving landowners the opportunity to produce good food, to look after their cattle and to provide jobs. They can then put a good rump on our tables, put a good rib fillet on our tables, put a good T-bone on our tables. Those opposite cannot see that. It is so disappointing and sad that decisions and the fate of rural Queenslanders is decided by votes of members in the Brisbane area. Rural people do not care if those opposite build a footbridge. They do not care if they build tunnels or big shopping centres. They are not interested in what those opposite do. But time and time again this government has attacked rural people and time and time again it has introduced rural policies that have condemned rural people. This is an opportunity for members of the government to redeem themselves. I call on them to support the people of Queensland by supporting this motion moved by the shadow minister for natural resources.